

GAPANG: THE PRACTICE OF "SLEEP-CRAWLING" IN A TAGALOG COMMUNITY

CAROLYN CRISPINO ISRAEL

SOME OF THE MOST NEGLECTED ASPECTS OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND sociological studies in the Philippines are the institutionalized patterns of sexual relations and activities. Aside from studies on formal marriage practices, there has been virtually no attempt made to probe deeper into the nature, causes and consequences of other sexual beliefs and practices such as aberrant non-heterosexual relations, i.e., lesbianism and homosexuality, and pre-marital as well as extra-marital sexual relations. The seemingly flourishing institutions of concubinage and prostitution are almost untouched in terms of empirical and theoretical inquiries.* It is very important that studies along these lines be made; such studies may shed light on, and provide a clearer understanding of, the other social components of Philippine society, especially the family system. Furthermore, knowledge of the existing attitudes, values and practices pertaining to sex may provide significant insights about their determining influence in the socialization process and eventually, in the personality formation of the Filipino.

This paper makes a modest attempt to contribute to the limited existing ethnography on Philippine patterns of sexual relations. It describes and analyzes a peculiar sex activity locally known as *gapang* obtaining in a rural Tagalog community**. (It literally means "to crawl.")

Gapang, or what Mead¹ calls "sleep-crawling" in her studies of Samoa, refers to a man's act of surreptitiously stealing into the bedside of a woman

* So far, the bulk of available materials on these subjects have been written by popular magazine writers who are not really technical specialists.

** Data contained in this paper were collected during a field research on "Social Organization, Cultural Values and Folk Medicine in Bay, Laguna" where the author worked as one of the field assistants of Dr. F. Landa Jocano, concurrently Chairman of the Department of Anthropology, University of the Philippines, in April-July, 1969. The project was sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation through the Comprehensive Community Health Program (CCHP), College of Medicine, University of the Philippines. The author wishes to thank Dr. Jocano for the permission granted in publishing parts of the field materials. She is likewise deeply indebted to the Asian Center for providing the funds necessary in the continuance of her personal research activities in the area, last July-September, 1970.

The methods of field research employed in this study were purely anthropological in nature and consisted of participant-observation, use of key informants and interview schedules and collection of case studies. Continuous residence in the barrio was initiated in April-July, 1969 and July-September, 1970 to facilitate interviews and to allow a closer observation of community life. To test the validity and accuracy of information given by informants, attempts at counter-checking with other subjects were likewise initiated.

¹ In Samoa, Mead notes a similar practice called *moetotolo*. Here a man commits *moetotolo* either because of anger for a girl's failure to show up for their clandestine

at night with the intention of "coercing" her into sexual relations. This is differentiated from the term *akyat* which is sleep-crawling executed by a woman.

In the case of this Laguna barrio studied, which this paper will refer to fictitiously as Barrio Tabing-tubig,² there are various motives and justifications given for this sex activity. According to barrio folks, a man desperately resorts to *gapang* when he fails to win the favor of the woman being courted. Thus, he crawls to her bedside at night when most of the older household members, especially the woman's parents, are not at home, often carrying with him a knife or any object with which to threaten the subject's life should she refuse or cry out for help.

The sleeping pattern in the barrio makes for a sleep-crawler's ease in planning out a successful time of "attack." Barrio Tabing-tubig represents a typical fishing community where sleeping habits are directly affected by fishing schedules. The time for going out into the lake follows a seasonal pattern and varies according to climatic temper. There are occasions when work starts from nine o'clock in the evening and ends at early dawn. A fisherman and his eldest son or sometimes even his wife, pack some food for snacks and a bottle of water and sail away into the deep areas of the lake to earn the following day's living. They spread the fishing nets and then wait until they gather enough catch while feasting on their *baon*³ and drinking *lambanog*⁴ in the motorized banca or on an island situated somewhere in the heart of the lake. There are also times when work starts at three o'clock in the morning and lasts until noontime. This happens more often when the weather is unfavourable and staying in the lake at night becomes very dangerous. Gambling in the form of games such as black-jack, lucky nine and *mahjong* as well as *barikan* (social drinking) are also heavily indulged in by the barrio adults, keeping them away from home for the most part of the night.

encounter "under the palm trees" or due to failure in love. Sometimes, also, the sleep crawler relies upon the girl's expecting a lover or the possibility that she will indiscriminately accept any comer.

Catching a *moetotolo* is counted great sports in Samoa. A cornered sleep-crawler is severely punished by the aggrieved party and becomes the laughing stock of the community.

² Barrio "Tabing-tubig" is a lakeshore community in Laguna, composed of four sitios and situated some twelve kilometers from the town proper. It has a conservative population estimate in 1968 of 2,700, grouped into about 550 families of which the average is seven. Fishing is the barrio's primary source of economic subsistence although various secondary and seasonal sources of income are available: rice and vegetable farming, rig and tricycle driving and factory as well as road construction employment.

The people are predominantly Roman Catholics although there is an ongoing mass conversion movement into the Aglipayan and the Jehovah's Witness Churches. Literacy is 67.7% (1960 Census of the Philippines). Health and sanitation fall short of the ideal standard since there is the virtual absence of sanitary sewage and drainage system.

³ *baon* — packed food to be eaten on the way to, or at the place of destination.

⁴ *Lambanog* — a native wine made from fermented coconut water.

Gapang may also involve an attempt on the part of a man to coerce his sweetheart into immediate marriage. This happens when the man feels that his woman is either still hesitant about getting married or is apparently being drawn closer to a new suitor; also when her parents show disapproval of him. Unlike in the first instance where threats are used to force a woman into giving in, here it is the woman's fear of a violent retribution on her boyfriend by the family members which prevents her from crying out for help. For instance, a female fish vendor whom the author had close association during her stay in the barrio confessed that she should not have been married at an early age to her husband had it not been for his "bold act of *paggapang*."

While incidents of *gapang* due to unrequited love are known, many of the cases, observed interestingly reveal that this practice is often utilized as an alibi to cover up for certain unsanctioned or illegitimate heterosexual relationships. In the previously mentioned motive for *gapang*, force or threat of force is a necessary condition for its successful operation. However, when utilized as a camouflage as when a couple desires to get married but cannot get parental approval, such condition is absent. In short, once *gapang* is used as an alibi, it ceases to be a form of surreptitious rape. In fact, the sexual adventure may be planned out beforehand by the parties involved. The woman sets the time when her sweetheart can successfully enter the house and sleep with her for the night only to be discovered the following morning by the angry and hysterical family members. Should the plan fail to materialize, as when a family member is awakened by careless noises created, the woman will have to pretend by giving a loud outcry while the man has to jump out of the window and run faster than the woman's father (who usually gets hold of a bladed instrument or any possible object of assault and gives chase.)

Lolo L. related an incident of *gapang* committed by his eighteen-year grandson:

Pedro once had a girl friend residing at Sitio W. When one time he asked her to sleep with him for the night, she consented and even proposed not to sleep with the siblings but near the *batalan* (kitchen area) to prevent the possible discovery of their tryst. However, the exact plan did not materialize for when Pedro surreptitiously entered the house he found no one in the *batalan*. So he entered the bedroom and saw three females lying side by side. Thinking that the one lying nearest the doorway was his girl friend, he gently touched her. Unfortunately, it was the younger sister who awakened and gave a loud cry. Pedro made a hurried attempt to escape but the father who was also awakened by the girl's cry met him at the door with a hammer. He was severely beaten up, had all of his lower frontal teeth knocked out and sustained other body injuries.

Neighbor who witnessed the incident said that Pedro could have died had he not been immediately brought to the nearest hospital.

For couples indulging in extra-marital sexual encounters, *gapang* can also become an effective alibi should either of the involved party's spouse

suddenly show up. For instance, the author noted in her field diary the following case:

I was eating halo-halo⁵ at Aling M.'s *ponda* (local mini-restaurant) when I overheard two men talking about a certain Mang C. who was beaten up by his neighbor, Mang B., the previous night. From what I've gathered in the conversation, what happened was that Mang B. arrived home from his fishing work at about four o'clock in the morning. While trying to tidy up his fishing gadgets, he heard whisperings in the house. He called to his wife who suddenly started shouting for help. Mang B. immediately run upstairs with a banca paddle and saw a figure trying to escape through the window. He gave chase and succeeded in hitting the escapee before the latter could jump to the ground and lose himself in the dark.

Mang B. turned to his wife who was still crying. He was told that the man broke into the house and threatened to kill her should she refuse the man's "advances."

At this instance, one of the bystanders who was also listening to the conversation gave a malicious laughter and commented: "naka-isa na naman ang nobyo ni M." (M. is Mang B.'s wife.)

While folks of Tabing-tubig frown on this practice, news of its occurrence is usually taken with humor. The "sleep-crawler" who fails and gets brutally beaten up by the woman's kinsmen is usually ridiculed by the males. He is branded as *mahina*. (The literal meaning of this word is "weak" although what the accusation more accurately refers to is the man's clumsiness in handling the situation.)

Gapang, therefore, appears to be a behavioral mechanism by which a man who was publicly shamed by a woman's refusal to accept his love can prove and assert his masculinity. Masculinity in this context may be defined in terms of a man's skill in winning the favor of the woman being courted through all possible means, legitimate or otherwise. Even if used as an alibi to cover up for an intentioned illicit sexual relations, the mere act of successfully breaking into somebody's house already adds to his reputation of being a "lintik sa babae" or fast with the girls. For the victimized woman, it is well and good should marriage follow such incident. However, even if it happens that the sleep-crawler was unsuccessful, her chastity becomes subjected to doubt and this lessens her chances of marriage. Adelina, a twenty-five year old fish vendor already regarded as an old-maid has had no suitor from the barrio ever since she was unsuccessfully attacked by an unaccepted suitor.

There are very few, if at all, cases recorded of a man's resorting to *gapang* for mere sexual gratification so that whoever the woman is becomes immaterial. The practice presupposes the existence of an earlier or ongoing relationship between the man and woman involved. In short, a man does not just sleep-crawl into any house he finds convenient breaking into.

⁵ *halo-halo* — a food preparation consisting of various diced tropical fruits and tubers mixed with ground ice, sugar and cream.

Besides, there are other and easier institutionalized ways for the fulfillment of the need for sexual pleasure in this community. Marriage usually comes at the early age of sixteen to twenty and prostitution houses litter the nearby towns.

Furthermore, the barrio is frequently visited by roving prostitutes who come in groups of two to four and headed by a male "manager." He and his professionals approach the barrio at about seven o'clock in the evening and proceed to an unoccupied shack earlier prepared for them by the "contact person." The latter is a resident of the barrio whose duties besides preparing the place are to spread the news of the visiting prostitutes and to scout for possible customers.

Accounts of teen-age boys interviewed in this regard offer the following information: When several men have already gathered in the house, the prostitutes would undress and perform some dancing stunts to the lusty music provided by the audience. Afterwards, they retreat to an adjacent room and the manager comes forward to recognize and accept the payments of all those who voiced out their intentions of taking his girls. The usual price for an hour's tryst ranges from one to three pesos.

Sex with the prostitutes may be done privately in the bedrooms, although sometimes, there are male customers who, accepting their friend's challenge, would perform the act in public.

Since there are only two to four prostitutes, the slated customers are serviced in rounds. Occasionally, pails of water are placed by the "contact person" in the room for the "girls'" use in cleaning their sweat-drenched bodies before resuming work. The night's labor ends at about two o'clock in the morning or just before the life of the day begins with the fishermen's slow walk to the lakeshore.

While the man is the aggressor in this particular practice, barrio folks also know of incidents wherein it is the woman who takes the initiative. Another term, however, is more often used to denote a case of *gapang* executed by a woman, and this is *akyat*. (It literally means "to climb" although what it connotes is the woman's discreet ascent to the man's house.) For instance, the author was once struck by the case of a marriage between a seventy-six year old widower and a woman of twenty. When further probing of the case was made, she found out through one of the old man's daughters with the first wife that this marriage came about as a result of the woman's frequent visitation of the old man in the house in which he used to live alone.

SOME SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As stated earlier, *gapang*, when used to overcome unrequited love, functions in two ways: it manifestly becomes a mechanism for effecting immediate marriage with the desired party and latently functions to maintain the image of the offender in the community which was threatened by

his being a rejected suitor. It likewise reinforces the man's acceptance into his peer group or *barkada*, which puts some value in the skillful performance of certain locally considered unconventional sexual escapades.

For married couples, the use of *gapang* as an alibi apparently prevents the "shameful" discovery of the illicit relationship and in a way, also hinders the possible breakage of the home and disruption of family ties, especially the husband-wife relations. It seems that even if a person is aware of an existing extra-marital affair of his/her spouse, he would outwardly accept the alibi if only to save his image in the community. This is so because while the infidel is ostracized by barrio-mates, the latter also put some blame on the aggrieved spouse. It is believed that a married person "fools around" (*nagluluko*) partly because he does not get adequate emotional companionship at home. This assertion is interestingly substantiated by the manner in which barrio folks answer to queries on extra-marital relations and marital separation. Whenever questions in this regard were asked, informants would first strongly criticize the branded offender in the case. Immediately afterwards, though, they would justify the offender's behavior by citing the spouse's faults or shortcomings. To illustrate:

In one of my casual conversations with Lola I, (my landlady), I inquired about the fate of widows and widowers in the barrio. In response, she gave an enumeration of the ones she could think of. When the name of a certain woman was uttered, Lolo B., who was seated nearby and listening to our conversation, interrupted, saying that the woman just mentioned was not a widow. Rather, she was separated from the husband, who, several years back left home in favor of another woman residing in a nearby barrio.

Lola I. readily accepted her husband's correction and proceeded by commenting on the man's immorality and irresponsibility towards the four deserted children. I inquired whether they know the exact details of the case—the possible reason(s) for the man's behavior—and Lola I, resignedly answered: "Hay naku talaga sigurong ganyan ang mga lalaki." Then, she further added: "Kasi naman masyadong pala-away at tsismosa si N." (What this statement implies is that the woman's contribution to the failure of her marriage is her being very quarrelsome and a gossip.)

In short, not only are the adulterers saved from public shame through the alibi of *gapang*, but their respective families as well.

It must be pointed out that complete husband-wife separation does not always result from the discovery of an illicit affair of either of the spouses. Sometimes, personality incompatibility and the inability of a person to tolerate some qualities of the marital partner come into the picture. For example, some of the recorded reasons for marriage separation are the dislike for work or "laziness" on the part of the husband, the stealing habit (*kleptomania*) of the wife as well as female domestic irresponsibility.

Finally, the frequency of *gapang* incidence is far less than the other locally disfavored mechanisms of effecting immediate marriage or for covering up intentional sexual encounters such as elopement and clandestine nocturnal meetings in the distant farm fields or on a sailing *banca* respectively.

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