

Power, Control, and Marriage: The Catholic Utilization of Indigenous Wives in Early Colonial Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Catholic missionaries encountered indigenous systems of marriage and sexuality that conflicted with Iberian marital and sexual practices during initial colonization. Consequently, missionaries demanded that indigenous Philippine men and women submit to these Iberian practices and encouraged them to be baptized. Enforcing these Iberian practices of morality had become especially difficult with men in polygynous marriages and men who refused to accept the Catholic faith. To combat this, Catholic missionaries went to the wives of these men. These wives wielded feminine power that enabled them to control certain aspects of their marriages. When these women converted to Christianity, they were able to convince their husbands to accept Catholic practices of morality. The opposite was true as well: women could convince their husbands to not adopt Christianity or its practices because of the influence they had. Accordingly, this paper argues that Catholic missionaries appropriated indigenous women's influence in marriage to convince men to accept Catholicism.

Keywords: Christianization, Dowry, Penis Pins, Polygyny, Women and Property.

Introduction

In the past several decades, the topic of women and gender in the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Philippines generated several discussions on the roles women played in precolonial society and the changes they faced after former colonization from what would eventually be known as the Spanish Empire. Two prominent works on the topic of women and colonization include that of Carolyn Brewer and Luciano P. R. Santiago. Brewer's work, *Shamanism, Catholicism and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521-1685*, argues that colonization violently repressed women and stripped their rights and privileges in order to set up a new gender and spiritual hierarchy. Her work serves a threefold purpose: it exposes the way the Spanish portrayed indigenous women, focuses on the hegemonic processes the colonizing powers used to reconstruct gender relations, and highlights the resistance of women to the changes brought by colonization and Hispanic Catholicism.¹ Santiago's work, *To Love and to Suffer*, on the other hand, argues that Christianization was ultimately good for the women of the archipelago.²

The works of Brewer and Santiago offer contrasting narratives. Brewer takes a more liberal approach, showing the colonization and Christianization of the

¹ Carolyn Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521-1685* (Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), xxiii.

² Luciano P. R. Santiago, *To Love and to Suffer: The Development of the Religious Congregations for Women in the Spanish Philippines, 1565-1898* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2005).

Philippines as a violent process towards women. Santiago, on the other hand, follows conservative elements and argues how Christianization benefitted women. In an attempt to reshape the current understanding of early colonial Philippine history, this paper seeks to bring the two arguments together in showing how indigenous women deployed their own agency to accept or reject Catholicism. In doing so, this paper will show how indigenous women of the Philippines wielded feminine power in their marital relationships, how Catholic clergy attempted to appropriate this feminine power, and how these indigenous women responded.

Feminine power is defined as the social and sexual power indigenous Philippine women wielded during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This power incorporates the sexual power Catholic missionaries assumed women held over men, as well as the economic leverage wives held over their husbands through dowries. This paper focuses on the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Philippines because these two centuries incorporate the Christianization of lowland societies in the archipelago. Through the efforts of Catholic missionaries from Europe, many parts of the lowland Philippines adopted Christianity. These missionaries used many methods to Christianize indigenous Philippine people. One of them was through the appropriation and utilization of these feminine powers inside marital and sexual relationships.

Catholic clergy, Spanish colonial officials, and other European visitors acknowledged the type of leverage indigenous Philippine women wielded in marital and sexual relationships. This leverage, or feminine power, was distinct because only women could have it in their marital relationships. Elements such as dowries, property, and sexual practices gave women significant power in their relationships and allowed them to control men in different areas of their lives. Catholic missionaries witnessed how women encouraged their husbands to adopt Christianity. This paper argues that missionaries understood that women held feminine power in marital and sexual relationships and harnessed that power within marriages to convert indigenous men.

Marital Relationships in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Philippines

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century Philippines, both women and men experienced more sexual liberties before and after marriage.³ In Mindanao and the Visayas, polygyny was a common practice, although it could only be practiced by men who had the economic ability to support multiple wives. This practice was limited to men in good financial standing, typically the chief of a village or a man of the higher classes.⁴ According to William Henry Scott, Tagalogs also practiced concubinage, or a system with a “secondary wife... usually of lesser rank than her husband.”⁵

Dowries were an interesting precolonial and early colonial concept and practice in the Philippines. When a man wanted to marry a woman, he would

³ Luis H. Francia, *A History of the Philippines: From Indios Bravos to Filipinos* (New York: Overlook Press, 2010), 41-42.

⁴ Linda Newson, *Conquest and Pestilence in the Early Spanish Philippines* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 59.

⁵ William Henry Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994), 217.

have to pay a dowry to her family before marrying her.⁶ The dowries men paid to the woman's family varied according to social status, wealth, and culture. Land, in the eyes of the indigenous Philippine people, was not a major source of wealth and was seen as a communal resource for a given community. Thus, men typically gave the woman's family gold, jewelry, or slaves as dowries.⁷ In lieu of a dowry, men also worked for a period of time in the paternal house of the future bride, allowing him to engage in sexual relations with her.⁸ Dowries therefore gave significant value to daughters. While men frequently gave these dowries to the male relatives of the bride in some cultures, particularly to her father or her brothers, it made the daughters and sisters of a family more valuable and even desired.⁹

According to *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas*, written by Jesuit historian Fray Pedro Chirino, the dowry could be returned if a marriage ended. If the marriage ended because of something the wife did, her family would lose their dowry and would have to pay it back. If the union dissolved because of the actions of the husband, the dowry remained with the wife's family.¹⁰ Because of this potential to lose the dowry, the family of the bride, at least in the Visayas, worked diligently to make a marriage last with their daughters so they would not lose the dowry.¹¹

This system of dowry is the opposite of what European women experienced in the early modern period when parents of the bride often brought dowries into her marriage to add value to their daughter. This dowry then became the husband's property and could not be owned by the woman, though some European women still managed and took care of the dowries they brought into the marriage, especially in situations where land was included as part of the dowry.¹² In Medieval Iberia, a woman's dowry became important in the control of land and property. Marriages and inheritances were influenced by the property a woman had claim to, and a woman and her family ties became important factors in the transfer of wealth.¹³ The concept of negotiating a dowry after a dissolving of a marriage was not foreign to the missionaries. In Medieval Europe, if a separation occurred in a marriage, the dowry was negotiated. If the wife was at fault, she forfeited her dowry and was typically socially ostracized or physically punished. If the husband was at fault, he would have to repay the dowry alongside a heavy fine.¹⁴

Divorce was another common practice in pre-Hispanic Philippine society. While the Catholic Church forbade divorce, indigenous polities permitted its

⁶ While the term "bride-wealth" may be more appropriate for situations similar to this, the Spanish documents all use the term "*dote*" to denote this dowry paid by men in courtship settings. Thus, the term "dowry" will be used to describe this transfer of wealth for this purpose.

⁷ Scott, *Barangay*, 140-142, 270.

⁸ John Leddy Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses, 1565-1700* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959), 19.

⁹ Scott, *Barangay*, 140-142. Newson, *Conquest*, 59.

¹⁰ Father Pedro Chirino and S. J. Roma, *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas* (Rome: Estevan Paulino, 1604), 67, accessed from Österreichische Nationalbibliothek - Austrian National Library, 69-71, accessed May 2, 2017, http://digital.onb.ac.at/OnbViewer/viewer.faces?doc=ABO_%2BZ166475101. Translations are my own.

¹¹ Newson, *Conquest*, 59.

¹² Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 37-38.

¹³ Heath Dillard, *Daughters of the Reconquest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 27, 47.

¹⁴ James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 516-520.

practice. Divorce could be initiated by either party, but Catholic missionaries observed it as excessive, claiming that it was a simple process triggered by the most trivial of issues. Chirino also said that it was uncommon to find a couple who were in their first marriage.¹⁵ When a couple divorced, precolonial culture already had systems in place to simplify the process. Since property belonged separately to men and women, division of property after divorce was not necessary unless it was shared. Chirino elaborates the division of slaves and children among the couple. Children were divided equally between the two parties with no distinction in regard to sex, and the same rule applied to slaves that were jointly owned by the couple.¹⁶ These systems helped simplify divorce and facilitated both men and women to leave a marriage. The party who suffered the most from a divorce was the husband who was at fault for the divorce because he would lose the dowry he gave to the wife's family. The wife, on the other hand, only suffered having her family lose the husband's dowry if she was at fault for the divorce.

The practice of dowries given to the family of a bride, sexual liberties, and the ease of divorce all show the power women wielded in sixteenth and seventeenth century marriage relationships in the Philippines. A woman held a great amount of influence over her husband because of the dowry. Her family could only lose the dowry through her own negligence or abusive behavior in the marriage. Her husband therefore was less motivated to dissolve the marriage in fear of losing this dowry and having to pay another to remarry. Women could also leave a marriage whenever they wanted, though it might cost her family the dowry. Nevertheless, if she did leave, she did not have to abandon her property and would take half of the children and half of the shared slaves. These elements empowered women and made divorce feasible and relatively simple, which would explain the frequency of such divorces. This gave women leverage over their husbands in the marriage, giving women advantage over men to sever the marriage should he fail to sustain the marriage in the way the wife wanted him to. If the man failed, his wife would leave and he would lose his dowry.

With the coming of the Spanish and the implementation of Catholic standards for marriage and sexuality, divorce was barred, as well as polygyny, and all sexual practices outside of a Catholic marriage. The dowry stayed in place until the eighteenth century and was banned when clergy and colonial officials feared that fathers were bargaining their daughters to men who had the highest dowry offer. Missionaries demanded that if a man was baptized, he had to dissolve his polygynous marriages and keep only one wife, preferably the principal or first wife. After baptism, a man and one of his wives would enter into a Catholic marriage sanctioned by the clergy through the Catholic marriage ceremony, regarded as a sacrament. Divorce, of course, could not occur after this marriage, as it was not recognized in the Catholic Church. They also implemented the sacrament of confession to monitor the sexual habits of the indigenous people and educate them in the standards of chastity required by Catholicism.¹⁷

While the implementation of Spanish and Catholic cultural constructs in the Philippines ultimately did away with polygynous relationships and the concept of divorce, some of these practices remained until official conversion to the Catholic Church and the entrance of a man and a woman into the Catholicized

¹⁵ Chirino, *Relacion*, 69-71, Antonio de Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, ed. José Rizal (Paris: Libreria de Garnier Hermanos, 1890), 301-303. Translations are my own. Newson, *Conquest*, 59, Scott, *Barangay*, 143.

¹⁶ Chirino, *Relacion*, 69-71.

¹⁷ Phelan, *Hispanization*, 60-68.

sacrament of matrimony. These practices included the woman's ability to divorce her husband, leading to her gaining half of all shared property and potentially controlling the dowry, and the sexual leverage she had in a pre-Christian relationship. These aspects gave women power in their relationships, and the clergy noted this power and used it in their utilization of these women to convert their husbands. Thus, the clergy could appropriate these indigenous forms of feminine power, including feminine leverage, to expand the Catholic church and motivate husbands to adopt Catholicism through their wives.

Sexual Power of Indigenous Women: The Penis Pins

Another form of indigenous power women wielded was sexual power. This manifested itself physically in the male usage of penis pins or penis inserts. Indigenous men placed these inserts horizontally in the head of the penis at a young age with both ends of the pins coming out on either side. Depending on the ethnic group or cultural practice, they used different materials to fashion these pins or placed different studs on each end of the pin. The purpose, according to the Catholic and Spanish sources, was to enhance the sexual pleasure of women during vaginal sex. It was noted that a woman would not engage in sex with a man if he did not have one. Missionaries observed this practice frequently in the southern low-land regions of the Philippines, mostly in the Visayas and the coastal areas of Mindanao.¹⁸

In describing these penis pins, Scott states that "in use, these ornaments required manipulation by the women herself to insert, and could not be withdrawn until the male organ was completely relaxed," and that "there were twenty or thirty different kinds [of pins] to cater to a lady's choice."¹⁹ These statements by Scott show the type of sexual power and leverage women held over their male sexual partners. They controlled the actual act of penetration and had a selection of inserts for their male partner to enhance their sexual experience in whatever way they wanted.

These pins and the practice in general horrified the Catholic clergy who thought it was the invention of the devil, an inhumane practice that put men in so much pain at such a young age.²⁰ They viewed the practice as a way to satisfy and pleasure indigenous women, which fitted well into the early modern European Catholic narrative that viewed women as the authors of sexual vice. Instead of placing the blame for perceived sexual immorality equally on men and women, Catholic culture placed a greater burden on the woman because of her assumed inherent danger to men because of their sexual allure. Uta Ranke-Heinemann argues that Catholic priests in early Christian Europe, due to their vows of celibacy, created distance between themselves and women. Despite this distancing, the continual sexual fascination these celibate priests had for women began painting women as dangerous and the priests began depicting women in a demonic light. She writes, "to this day the Church's celibates believe that danger has a female face." A number of women within the Catholic Church went from second sex to temptress in the eyes of the priests. Women were not just seen as a weaker sex, incapable of doing as much as men could, but also as a constant temptation to men that could never be taken away. Women became the

¹⁸ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680: Volume One: The Lands below the Winds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 149. Tom Harrisson, "The 'PALANG', its History and Proto-History in West Borneo and the Philippines" *Journal of the Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society* 37, pt. 2 (1964), 168-172.

¹⁹ Scott, *Barangay*, 24.

²⁰ Scott, *Barangay*, 24.

perpetrators of sexual sin, alluring men to disobey the commandments of God and seducing the clergy to violate their vows.²¹ James A. Brundage also argues that men painted women as hiding behind a veil of modesty that hid an insatiable female sexual appetite. They were seen as mentally less acute than men and incapable of controlling their sexual desires and always sought after sex.²² Friars and missionaries brought this perception of women with them to the Philippines during their early proselytizing efforts in the archipelago, and the reality of penis pins only supported this idea.²³

Then, the indigenous woman, a natural temptress simply for being a woman according to the European male framework held by Catholic clergy, both Jesuits and Dominicans, regressed to an even more carnal creature in the eyes of the clergy when she demanded that men physically injure themselves for the sake of her sexual pleasure. Brewer argues that Catholic ideas of gender and sexuality deeply influenced clerical perception of the penis pins. She states that the penis pin validated these ideas of a woman's inherent carnal nature and painted indigenous Visayan and Mindanao women as lustful beings that tempted men to their demise, as Eve did with Adam in the Christian story of creation and humankind's fall from paradise.²⁴

The Catholic clergy made it a requirement that the penis pins be removed for baptism and not be used again. Brewer argues that this was done to impose a Catholic system of monogamy and sexuality that restricted the sexual liberties of the indigenous populations.²⁵ She also makes a strong point that penis pins within themselves cannot be simply analyzed as a woman's sexual dominance over her male partner. Instead, she looks at the penis pins as "symptomatic of a gender symmetry or parallelism with mutual power and authority enjoyed by both Filipino women and men."²⁶ On the contrary, the Catholic missionaries viewed it as a sinful manifestation of the women's sexual desire; thus, they threw the blame of this "immoral" practice onto the women, the perpetrators of lust. Despite the clergy's understanding of the practice, Brewer does well in describing the oversimplified nature of the discourse of penis pins. She argues that claiming the practice of penis pins was due only to satisfy the sexual desires of the indigenous Philippine women is too simplistic and gives undue weight to clerical observations that focused heavily on the "immoral" desire of the women to use the pin during intercourse.

Primary source accounts about the penis pins in the Philippines reveal more about them and their purpose when it comes to feminine power. Spanish colonial official Antonio de Morga in his 1609 work *Sucesos de las islas Filipinas* (History of the Philippine Islands) recounts the use of penis pins among the Visayans, mentioning that the women "shed a lot of blood and received other harm," but that they still used them for the sake of their own pleasure.²⁷ Jesuit missionary Francisco Ignacio Alcina in his seventeenth century work, *Historia de las Islas e Indios de Bisayas* describes the practice among the Visayans in detail, claiming that it had "almost disappeared completely" when he compiled his work in the

²¹ Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality and the Catholic Church* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1990), 119-125.

²² Brundage, *Law*, 424-427.

²³ Brewer, *Shamanism*, 31-32.

²⁴ Brewer, *Shamanism*, 31-32.

²⁵ Brewer, *Shamanism*, 32.

²⁶ Brewer, *Shamanism*, 31.

²⁷ Morga, *Sucesos*, 309.

mid-seventeenth century.²⁸ He states that “the men, in order to demonstrate their courage,” pierced their penises, which was “accompanied by the most excruciating pain.” The purpose of this piercing, according to Alcina, was “for greater incitement to carnal pleasure, not only on the part of the men but especially the women.” He describes how, before its banishment with the advancement of Christianity, those men without a penis pin were mocked, and this further motivated men to undergo the painful operation, even at the risk of death from the piercing. In regard to the women, he states that many women died from a resentful husband who used sharpened iron pins to brutally wound his sexual partner during intercourse.²⁹ At the end of his description of the practice, Alcina refers to the Queen of Cambodia who implemented a similar practice in her polity “to dissuade [the men] from the unnatural sin, so widespread among many.”³⁰ This “unnatural sin” is a reference to sodomy, which, at the time in Hispanic-Catholic culture, had a vague definition, but typically covered any sexual act outside of vaginal sex.³¹

A third source, coming from an English account of Thomas Candish’s circumnavigation around the world completed in 1588, describes a crew of Englishmen encountering the indigenous people of the island of Capul off the northern coast of Samar.³² Master Francis Pretty, an Englishman employed on the journey, recorded that, “these people use a strange kinde [sic] of order among them.” Pretty continues with a description of the penis piercing practices of the indigenous people. Pretty observes: “This custome was granted at the request of the women of the country, who finding their men to be given to the fowle sinne of Sodomie, desired some remedie against that mischief.”³³

All three of these accounts reference how women wanted the penis pins implemented in their society. All three accounts were also written by European men. Morga and Alcina both argue it was for the sexual pleasure of the women, supporting the Spanish and Catholic mindset that women were the face of evil and the perpetuators of all lustful vices. It is interesting to note that the English historian Pretty does not make any mention of the women encouraging the practice for their own sexual pleasure, but to control the men from committing sexual acts of which they supposedly disapproved. Alcina supports this theory through the example of the unnamed Queen of Cambodia, but does not link it directly to the Visayan people. In all three cases, the three European authors support the idea of penis pins being implemented to control the sexual habits of the men in their societies.

²⁸ Francisco Ignacio Alcina, S.J., *Historia de las islas e indios de Bisayas... 1668* translated and edited by Cantius J. Kobak, and Lucio Gutierrez (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press, 2005), 1:146-147. Translations are from Kobak.

²⁹ Alcina, *Historia de las islas e indios de Bisayas*, 146-147.

³⁰ Alcina, *Historia de las islas e indios de Bisayas*, 146-147.

³¹ Pete Sigal, “(Homo)Sexual, Desire and Masculine Power in Colonial Latin America: Notes towards an Integrated Analysis,” in *Infamous Desire: Male Homosexuality in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Pete Sigal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1-10.

³² Francis Pretty, “The admirable and prosperous voyage of the Worshipfull Master Thomas Candish of Trimley...” in *Principall Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1600) by Richard Hakluyt (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1904), 11:332-333. The work itself originally encompassed three volumes, but was reprinted in mass in the early twentieth century. While there could be issues with the reproduction of the sixteenth-century work in the twentieth century, the retention of the same writing style, including the unstandardized use of English spelling, suggests that the twentieth-century reproduction has authentic value to it. As well, the facts revealed by Pretty in this quote are supported by Alcina and Morga. This source differs mostly from Alcina and Morga in the fact that it is interpreted through English cultural understanding of sexual practices and not Spanish or Catholic understanding.

³³ Pretty, “The admirable and prosperous...”, 332-333.

Scholars Donald E. Brown, James W. Edwards, and Ruth P. Moore analyze the practice of penis piercings and implants throughout Southeast Asia and make alternative explanations to their purposes.³⁴ They explain that magical concepts attached to piercing and tattooing the body are general throughout Southeast Asia. Moreover, jewelry was used as a status of wealth or societal position. This practice was also used for medicinal purposes through indigenous charms and magic. Three of their explanations shed light on the practice in the sixteenth century Philippine world with regard to the penis pin's relation to feminine power.

One specific penis pin used by men was called the *sacra*. It was an actual ring-like object with the pin going around the center. It was meant to have the ring encircle the entire circumference of the penis. Around it, it had six lotus petals, with the seventh and eighth representing the pin itself. The word *sacra* is a derivative of the Sanskrit word *cakra*, which refers to the centers of force and energy in the body. One of those centers is the genitals, where the *sacra* was worn. The *cakra* concept, the lotus petals around the *sacra*, as well as the eight-pegged wheel imagery of the *sacra* all point to Hindu and Buddhist concepts of spirituality and its tie to sexual excitation.³⁵

This idea of Hindu-Buddhist themes tied to the *sacra* enhance the argument regarding a woman's sexual power. Brown, Edwards, and Moore state: "In Tantric Buddhism women are conceived of as powerfully sexually motivated. Correspondingly, we find female sexual lust given as an explanation for the various penis inserts." They further explain that in Hindu Tantrism, the most powerful sexual union should occur during the menstruation of a woman. This is because the combination of semen and vaginal blood (white and red) is seen as "magically" powerful.³⁶ "Correspondingly," they state, "in the Philippines we find frequent comment [in Spanish sources] on the blood the women sheds during copulation with the penis inserts." Thus, the pins are a means to produce vaginal blood during intercourse so the blood and the semen can produce this powerful "magic."³⁷

This argument of using penis pins to achieve Buddhist and Hindu levels of spirituality, or "magic" in their words, shows the significance of penis pin usage, but has conflicting meanings in regard to feminine power. The idea of using the *sacra* to draw blood for magical purposes supports the findings of Barbara Watson Andaya who notes the perceived magical powers menstrual blood had in precolonial and early colonial Philippine society.³⁸ Moreover, Tantric Buddhism views women as sexually powerful, thus encouraging and promoting the usage of the penis pins. This supports the argument that women wanted to use penis pins for their sexual gratification, giving increased power to women. On the contrary, the fact that a penis pin would have to inflict enough damage to a woman's reproductive tract to draw blood seems to counteract the feminine power of the penis pin.

³⁴ Donald E. Brown, James W. Edwards, and Ruth P. Moore, *The Penis Inserts of Southeast Asia: An Annotated Bibliography with an Overview and Comparative Perspectives* (Berkeley: University of California at Berkeley, 1988), 8-12.

³⁵ Brown, *Penis Inserts*, 9.

³⁶ Brown, *Penis Inserts*, 9-10.

³⁷ Brown, *Penis Inserts*, 9-10.

³⁸ Barbara Watson Andaya, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 71-72.

Alcina and Morga both note the physical damage the practice had on the women, mentioning how they lost blood during the practice. But as Morga states, women still enjoyed the practice. Alcina argues that the loss of blood was a malicious act performed by men to enact revenge against their female sexual partner. In addition, with the *sacra/cakra* argument made by Brown, Edwards, and Moore, the female shedding of blood during sexual intercourse can be seen as a spiritual experience, a sexual pleasure, or a violent act depending on the intents and desires of both participants.

Linda Newson argues that penis pins in the Philippine context caused injuries to both men and women. In the case of men, it is more obvious with the potential medical complications that follow the piercing of the penis. Women, on the other hand, could also suffer physically from the damage penis pins did to their reproductive track. These two factors, however, could be the very reason why penis pins were seen as a means of birth control and a way to curb men and women's sexuality.³⁹ The potential use of the penis pins to discourage men from engaging in "sodomy" or "the unnatural sin" are also another form of curbing men's sexuality. Brown, Edwards, and Moore also discuss the curbing of male sexuality and the frequency of intercourse. With a piercing as intense as the penis pin, men were less likely to engage in sexual acts because of the potential damage it could cause to the penis.⁴⁰ One could not flippantly engage in sexual acts without considering the serious consequences a man could face if such an encounter was poorly planned or executed. With the potential consequences penis pins could inflict on a man, the number of sexual encounters was surely lower compared to populations where men had no penis pins. This idea that penis pins curbed male sexuality is supported by Newson who argued that penis pins were a means of birth control. In sixteenth-century Visayan culture, large family sizes were undesired, and penis pins, coupled with abortions and infanticide, helped keep population numbers down.⁴¹ Thus, penis pins gave women more control over the frequency of sexual intercourse as well as lessened her chances of conceiving a child as a result.

One last argument Brown, Edwards, and Moore make involves masculinity. They state that indigenous men perhaps saw "the inserts being installed as a sign of attaining manhood" and it being "connected with masculine bravery and swagger."⁴² This idea subtracts feminine power from the penis pins as they become a symbol of bravery, maturity, and masculine pride. Thus, the penis pin can also be a masculine symbol of power and a tool of feminine power, giving complementary sexual powers to both men and women. Alcina's statement supports the idea that penis pins increased male power in sexual relationships. Men needed to pierce their penises to avoid being mocked by their peers or their potential female sexual partners. Alcina also says that men experienced more sexual pleasure from the pins, though not as much as women. Brown, Edwards, and Moore support the argument that it was a sign of bravery and maturation, and therefore validates the idea that men benefitted socially from this practice.

The discussion and history of the penis pins in the sixteenth-century Philippines is very complex. Spanish colonizers and the Catholic clergy alike seemed to agree that the penis pin was a tool of the woman to exercise sexual

³⁹ Newson, *Conquest*, 59-60.

⁴⁰ Brown, *Penis Inserts*, 10.

⁴¹ Newson, *Conquest*, 59-60.

⁴² Brown, *Penis Insert*, 10.

dominance over her male sexual partners. A different perspective, however, reveals that the topic of the penis pins is much more complicated and actually gave complimentary power to both men and women.

Europeans saw the penis pin as a tool of sexual leverage as women used this leverage to sexually control their male counterparts. Through the perspective of Brown, Edwards, and Moore, that leverage still holds, though men seem to have derived some form of power from the practice, too. However, women still gained “magical” power from the penis pins, as well as sexual leverage and reproductive control. Women benefitted from the practice as their male counterparts did. They could use the penis pins as a form of sexual leverage to control aspects of a man’s sexuality. Alcina and Candish’s statements that women implemented these pins to curtail the practice of sodomy supports the existence of this leverage, showing that women wanted to control the types of sexual intercourse men would engage in with them by encouraging the use of the penis pins. Newson’s argument that the pins also acted as a form of birth control because of decreased sexual contacts also supports this argument. Despite this evidence of sexual leverage and the benefits and power men derived from the practice, the use of penis pins was a physical manifestation of the sexual control women had over men. Penis pins did provide women with some level of sexual leverage over men, and even after the missionaries forced men to remove their penis pins at baptism, the sexual power of women would have still existed since the pins were only a symbol of that power. The missionaries understood this sexual leverage women had over their husbands and utilized this leverage to encourage wives to influence their husbands to convert.

Through their observations on the practice of penis piercings, as well as dowries and divorces, the clergy saw the feminine power women wielded in marital and sexual relationships. They noted that these feminine powers influenced how their husbands acted in both marital and sexual relationships. They knew that they could exploit the power women had to encourage husbands to accept the Catholic faith. By working with the women, the clergy could ultimately convince the men to submit to their authority through pressuring these men’s wives.

Women’s Power in the Conversion Process of Men

The Jesuits and Dominicans both recorded instances where indigenous Philippine women influenced their husbands to either accept or reject Christianity. Chirino shows clearly that Jesuit friars observed women who influenced their husbands to convert to Catholicism. This occurred in cases both involving chiefs or men of higher social status in society and those with no specified social status. In the late sixteenth century in Alanglang, Leyte, a Visayan woman convinced her husband to accept Christianity.⁴³ The village experienced high numbers of conversions because of the music played in the church.⁴⁴ One particular woman of the village received her baptism so joyfully that a few days after she “persuaded her husband to become a Christian and was one of who happily attended to the practices of the Christians.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Chirino, *Relacion*, 98-99.

⁴⁴ D. R. M. Irving has a detailed study on the use of music to Christianize and Hispanize the people of the Philippines. See D. R. M. Irving, *Colonial Counterpoint: Music in Early Modern Manila* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴⁵ Chirino, *Relacion*, 99.

In the village of Dulag in Leyte in the years 1598 and 1599, another event occurred where a woman motivated her husband to adopt Christianity.⁴⁶ A “Gentile”⁴⁷ woman worried about the sickness her “Gentile” husband had contracted. Worrying that he would die and hearing that only good Christians went to heaven and all others burned in hell, she called for a missionary to baptize him. “She helped him to make his answers,” Chirino stated, as the priest asked the husband if he wanted to receive baptisms or instructions. Seeing the woman’s desire for her husband to be baptized, the priest asked her if she wanted to be baptized as well. The priest baptized her husband first, due to his worsening illness. The baptism brought him health, which made the woman desire it even more. She received her baptism afterwards and both were united in the sacrament of marriage in the Catholic Church. In these two examples, Chirino shows the observations of the Jesuits, but in other instances, the clergy utilized the sexual and marital leverage women held. The missionaries translated this power in a way that would help bring the husbands of these women into the Church.

Clerical Intervention

Another event that Chirino describes showed the stubbornness of the chiefs in Ibabao, an island off the coast of Samar, in accepting Catholicism.⁴⁸ He claims that the chiefs often only became Christians when all of the other indigenous people adopted Christianity. In one instance, in an undisclosed location in either Ibabao or Samar, Chirino describes a chief who refused to allow his wife to listen to the Jesuit missionaries or to attend the church. He forced her to stay home instead. Chirino states, “she sent a message to the Father making it known that her husband was using this force against her.”⁴⁹ Once the priest ascertained that the chief was withholding his wife from attending mass, he had the chief arrested. Being freed from her husband’s forceful actions, the woman accepted baptism. After this, Chirino states that “she attained from God...the conversion of the husband.”⁵⁰ The chief returned to the church humbly and accepted baptism.

This incident differs from the previous two incidents in Alanglang and Dulag that Chirino describes. In this account, a man shows spiritual domination over his wife by refusing to let her attend the Catholic Church or to become a Christian. The Jesuits responded with the help of Spanish authorities by arresting the man for refusing to let his wife join the Christian faith. It is interesting to note, however, that her baptism into the Church motivated her husband to do the same. While the account is lacking in detail, it credits this woman for the baptism of her husband. Not only did she have the power to supersede her husband’s decision of keeping her from attending the Catholic ceremonies by calling on the Jesuits, but she also successfully motivated him to join the Christian faith through her example. She would have convinced her husband to join the Catholic faith through the marital leverage she had. As an indigenous woman who recently accepted the faith, she could have easily left her husband for refusing to allow her to attend the Catholic ceremonies and taken the dowry with her. However, using this as leverage, she obtained her husband’s baptism and brought him under Catholic authority.

⁴⁶ Chirino, *Relacion*, 105-106.

⁴⁷ “*gentil*” is the term used in the original Spanish. Chirino, *Relacion*, 105.

⁴⁸ Chirino, *Relacion*, 165-166.

⁴⁹ “*embio un recaudo al Padre haziendo le saber, que el marido la hazia esta fuerça.*” is the original text. Chirino, *Relacion*, 165.

⁵⁰ Chirino, *Relacion*, 165-166.

Lalo

While Chirino records many events of women motivating their husbands to convert to Catholicism in the Visayas, Fray Diego Aduarte makes mention of Dominicans observing a Pangasinan woman's role in the Christianization of her husband, the chief. *Historia de la Provincia del Sancto Rosario de la Orden de Predicadores* (History of the Province of the Holy Rosary of the Order of Preachers) written by Aduarte recounts the conversion of Casipit, the "great chief" of Mangaldan probably sometime during the first two decades of the seventeenth century.⁵¹ He describes the man as being so opposed to the faith that he almost killed a Franciscan missionary who was previously in the region. "This *Indio* had thrown him on the ground to kill him with a cruel dagger that they use," Aduarte states, "and would have if the others had not hindered him."⁵² When the Dominicans came to Pangasinan, Casipit was enraged. He went to Manila to arrange to have the friars removed and even bargained half of his property to his *encomendero* in an effort to achieve this.

Fortunately for the Dominicans, Casipit was married to a woman who embraced Christianity. Her name was Lalo, and she was "the first to be converted" by the Dominicans in Mangaldan.⁵³ After her baptism, she insisted that her husband become a Christian, using "many warnings" and receiving help from the priests.⁵⁴ Casipit eventually yielded and was baptized with their three daughters and the rest of their household. He then became a great tool for the Dominicans and set himself as an example to all of the people of Mangaldan and the surrounding area. He gathered the people around the church to exhort them to follow the Catholic precepts. While the account focuses on praising Casipit for his conversion and his help in converting the people of Mangaldan and the surrounding area, it also credits Lalo for her diligent efforts and wonderful example in spreading the Catholic faith, especially to other women.

This account shows that Jesuits were not the only order to observe this phenomena in the islands as the Dominicans negotiated the conversion of Casipit through his wife, Lalo. When the Dominicans entered Mangaldan, they encountered a chief who threatened the Augustinians that previously proselytized in the village and went to Manila to get the clergy out of his village.⁵⁵ The Dominicans could not subdue or baptize Casipit easily. However, the first person they baptized was his wife, Lalo. The Dominicans could have chosen any other person to baptize first, but they chose her because of the leverage she had over her husband. The clergy baptized Lalo and worked closely with her and encouraged to work with her husband so he would be baptized.

⁵¹ Diego Aduarte, *Historia de la Provincia del Sancto Rosario de la Orden de Predicadores en Philippinas, Japon y China...* (Manila: Colegio de Sacto Thomas), 1640, 1:348-352, accessed from Biblioteca Virtual de Patrimonio Bibliografico, 1:83-86, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://bvpb.mcu.es/es/consulta/registro.cmd?id=399061>. Translations are my own.

⁵² Aduarte, *Historia*, 1:83.

⁵³ Aduarte, *Historia*, 1:83.

⁵⁴ Aduarte, *Historia*, 1:83.

⁵⁵ Phelan adds insight into this discussion: "Given the triple handicaps of a shortage of ecclesiastical personnel, the scattered distribution of the population, and linguistic diversity, the geographical apportionment of the missionary foundations required careful advance planning; the lack of such foresight, prior to 1594, had led to the abandonment of several missions. But on April 27, 1594, the Council of the Indies in Spain instructed the governor and the bishop to divide up the Philippines into contiguous areas among the four religious orders." Phelan then explains how the Dominicans, after 1594, were assigned Pangasinan and Cagayan. Thus, the existence of an Augustinian in Mangaldan is probably through the establishment of an Augustinian mission in or around Pangasinan before 1594. It was subsequently replaced by the Dominicans afterwards. See Phelan, *Hispanization*, 49-50.

Through utilizing her sexual and marital leverage, Lalo and the Dominicans succeeded in subduing Casipit.

The reasons for Lalo's agreement to work with the Dominicans to convert her husband becomes more apparent with Casipit's visit to Manila. The fact that Casipit knew he needed to travel to Manila to appeal to the Spanish authorities to remove the Dominicans from Mangaldan shows that he was well aware of what was going on in the surrounding area. Lalo, being his wife, would have had some idea as well. She probably heard of several stories of quelled rebellions from other groups who fought against the Spanish. Seeing that working with the missionaries was a means to preserve her social status, as well as her own safety and that of her family and property, she decided to work with the Dominicans. The Dominicans, of course, wanted the conversion of Casipit, and she would have agreed to work with Casipit and convert him to protect their privileges as *principales*, or the power-holding class of indigenous society. This interaction between Lalo and the Dominicans was a form of negotiation between the two parties, to use the words of Bushnell and Greene.⁵⁶ Lalo needed her privilege and her security, and the Dominicans needed Casipit. The two parties made the negotiation, and Lalo worked with Casipit to convince him to join Catholicism.

Aduarte recounts that Lalo used "many warnings" to convince her husband to accept Christianity.⁵⁷ While these could be interpreted as the dangers of hell and purgatory that await those who reject Catholicism, they could have also been politically based. With her standing in the marriage, especially her dowry since she was a member of the *principalia*, Lalo could have easily convinced Casipit the potential dangers of fighting against the Dominicans and the Spanish. She could have warned him about the impending raids and the potential loss of their privilege. It is likely that through these means, coupled with the leverage she had in the marital relationship, Lalo convinced Casipit to adopt Christianity.

With the baptism of Casipit came the conversion of their daughters and their household, including presumably their slaves. Once converted, the Dominicans praised Casipit for his work of preaching Catholic principles to the people of Mangaldan and the surrounding area. He became a tool of the Dominicans to enhance their missionary efforts and increase baptisms in the surrounding area. Lalo helped in the process, as well, though the Dominicans gave more credit to Casipit. Both the Jesuit accounts of the Visayan conversions and the Dominican conversions of Lalo and Casipit show how the clergy utilized women in a way to convert specific individuals. These examples also show that women played a highly significant role in the conversion of their husbands during the initial Christianization of the islands. This argument is further sustained in polygynous relationships.

Polygyny

While Chirino gives many examples of people in monogamous relationships converting to Christianity because of the deeds of the wife, his account also sheds light on the more complicated topic of polygyny. As discussed earlier,

⁵⁶ Amy Turner Bushnell and Jack P. Greene, "Peripheries, Centers, and the Construction of Early Modern American Empires: An Introduction," in *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500-1820*, ed. Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2002), 1-14.

⁵⁷ Aduarte, *Historia*, 1:83.

polygynous relationships needed to be dissolved by a man if he wished to join the Catholic faith. In doing so, he had to forfeit the dowry he gave to the wives he needed to let go of. Despite this obstacle, Chirino records that at least one man gave up this dowry because of the influence of his wife, presumed to be part of the *principalia*.

Chirino describes the conversion of an indigenous man who had three wives, primarily through the conversion of one of his wives in the late sixteenth century.⁵⁸ In the village of Palo on the island of Leyte, Jesuit missionaries encountered a group of Visayans who accepted Catholicism without much difficulty. However, Chirino describes one man with three wives, all of high rank like their husband.⁵⁹ “Although it was painful for him to think about leaving the two,” Chirino explains, “his greater contemplation was the dowry that he would lose.”⁶⁰ This put the Jesuits in a predicament where they could not baptize the man until he abandoned his polygynous practices. However, one Jesuit formulated a plan for this man’s conversion. This Jesuit, “inspired by the Lord our God,” went to the wife “that he loved the most” and persuaded her to be baptized.⁶¹ The woman did not hesitate. She claimed that she already wanted to become a Christian and was willing to do it, even if it meant disappointing her husband. She made this well known to the Jesuits, her husband, and others. The Jesuits responded by baptizing her, an event that was celebrated with feasts and dances. Chirino continues, “her husband saw this, put away the other two wives, giving them what was from his dowry.”⁶² He then accepted baptism on Easter day with eleven other chiefs alongside the festivities of the day which many people attended to.

In this situation, Jesuits encouraged this woman in such a manner to motivate her husband to forsake polygyny and to accept Catholicism. They intentionally chose his favorite wife who, to their fortune, already desired to become Christian. Once this was done, she worked with her husband and motivated him to divorce the other two wives and to give back their dowries. Aware of the sacrifice made by this man and the potential for this scenario to bring more Visayans into the Church, the Catholics turned his baptism into a public event. They chose one of the most holy days of the year: Easter Sunday, to baptize him and eleven other chiefs. Afterwards they had festivities to celebrate the occasion. This was done clearly to motivate others to follow the example of this chief, his wife, and the other chiefs, and to become Christians.

This example contains clear calculations. The Jesuits wanted to convert this chief to motivate the lower social classes to follow suit. To do so, they turned to his favorite wife, converted her, motivated her to convince her husband to accept baptism, then publicly baptized him. They recognized the social and sexual power she had in the relationship, which made her husband divorce the other two women so he could become a Christian. There are many explanations as to why this woman was his favorite wife, or why she was influential enough to convince him to divorce the other wives. She could have had the most expensive dowry, making her the wife with the most monetary leverage in the relationship. She even told the Jesuits she would leave her husband to join the Church, if needed. The fault of the divorce could have been placed on the husband if she

⁵⁸ Chirino, *Relacion*, 68-69.

⁵⁹ The term used is “*principales*.” Chirino, *Relacion*, 69.

⁶⁰ The original states, “*aunque se le hazia de mal dexarlas dos, mas reparava en el dote, que avia de perder*.” Chirino, *Relacion*, 69.

⁶¹ Chirino, *Relacion*, 69.

⁶² Chirino, *Relacion*, 69.

made a good enough case, forcing her husband to give up his dowry. Her eagerness to abandon her husband in order to accept Christianity also suggests that she had issues with the marriage, which she could have used as leverage to put him at fault for the divorce. If she had the largest dowry and divorced her husband, he would have suffered the most economically by this wife's separation than from separating from the other two. She could have also literally been the wife "he loved most" because of his sexual or romantic attraction towards her. As stated earlier, women had sexual control over men, particularly in the Visayas. Penis pins were a physical manifestation of this sexual control women wielded. Even with the forced removal of the penis pins, this sexual leverage would have persisted, and she still would have had this sexual power in her marriage even without its physical manifestation of it.

While her motives cannot be fully known for sure from this source alone, it is clear that the Jesuits utilized her and the situation to baptize the chief and motivate the lower classes of Visayans to do the same by publicly celebrating his baptism with eleven other chiefs. Although this account records Jesuit 'triumphs,' they had their failures as well. Chirino recounts the story of a chief in Butuan, named Silongan, who had seven wives.⁶³ Chirino describes Silongan as the "largest fish," using Biblical language where Jesus called the apostles to become fishers of men in his mission.⁶⁴ He was devoted to Christian principles and worked closely with the Jesuits to ensure that the priests were taken care of. Silongan and his warriors even defended the Jesuits twice when enemies came to harass or plunder the region and their clerical transplants. Despite these great acts of heroism towards the Jesuits, Silongan could not get baptized. "Although he dismissed five of his wives," the account reads, "one of them holds him captive that he has settled with having two wives."⁶⁵ While the account is not explicit as to why he chose to remain with two wives, it is assumed that one was the principle wife or his first wife, whom he would not part with, and the second was another wife who refused to leave him. Her "[holding] him captive," through a Jesuit lens, suggests that the Jesuits blamed her for keeping him from baptism. Hence, because of the refusal of this second wife to leave, as described in the account, he settled with having both this wife and his principle wife. The Jesuits, according to Chirino, tried multiple ways to sever this marriage, but none availed and Silongan remained with both wives.

In contrast to the story of Palo, we see that one wife had the influence and power to refuse to leave a marriage. Even with the prodding of the Jesuits, she still chose not to abandon her husband. For some unexplained reason, her husband would not part with her, either. This is evident that, even with Jesuit attempts to utilize the situation, women still had agency and enough influence to choose their own paths and not follow the clergy. The reasons why Silongan did not abandon his one wife could also have to do with the dowry or the sexual leverage she had over him. Both sexual leverage and dowry were cultural aspects of marriage that existed in Butuan at the time. Butuan, located in coastal Mindanao, used penis pins until their eradication, but, as with the Visayas, women would have still have had sexual leverage despite the elimination of the pin. Thus, the power women had in a marital relationships could motivate their husbands to adopt or reject Christianity.

⁶³ Chirino, *Relacion*, 97-98.

⁶⁴ Matthew 4:19 KJV, Chirino, 98. "*pece mayor*" is the original term for "largest fish" in Spanish. Due to Biblical context of becoming fishers of men, the term "largest fish" is the most appropriate translation.

⁶⁵ Chirino, *Relacion*, 98.

Conclusion

The examples of Lalo in Pangasinan, the wife of the imprisoned husband in the Samar region, and the polygynous wife in Leyte, all reveal that the Catholic clergy understood feminine power in marital relationships, harnessed this power by converting specific women, and had those women influence their husbands. The example of Silongan's wife in Butuan also shows, however, that women maintained their agency and, holding onto this sexual power, could also influence men to not convert to Catholicism.

Through clerical recognition of feminine power in the form of dowries, divorce, sexuality, and penis pins, the clergy realized the type of influence women had in monogamous and polygynous marriages. Jesuit missionaries, and probably many others, then observed that when a woman converted to Catholicism, she frequently convinced her husband to be baptized as well. In confronting male figures they needed to convert, especially village chiefs like case Casipit, Silongan, and the chief in Leyte, Catholic missionaries worked with their wives to convert their husbands. While they failed in Silongan's case because one of his wives chose not to obey the Jesuits, all three cases, alongside the Visayan man who was arrested, show the utilization of indigenous wives and their ability to convert indigenous husband.

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