

ABSENTEE WIVES AND HOUSEHUSBANDS: POWER, IDENTITY AND FAMILY DYNAMICS*

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Summary

This study looks into the changes that occur in men when their wives leave the family for overseas work to become the main providers. It examines the processes the men undergo to establish their identities as men or redefine themselves according to their changing situation. The whole range of experience in maintaining or protecting their masculine identities and achieving masculine ideals, as well as the difficulties or rewards associated with their achievement owing to their harsh economic realities is also investigated. My preliminary survey revealed that the collective view of Ilocano masculinity is associated with men as being good providers, virile sex partners, and responsible fathers.

When women leave and become the main providers, this idealized notion is challenged. Many wives become Overseas Contract Worker (OCW) because of the inadequacy of husbands as providers, and in turn they become the main providers. Berba's study (*Philippine Star*, 8/4/98) confirms this role reversal as a threat to their masculinity since "societal norms still affirm that there is something wrong with the man if the

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woman is making more money.” Moreover, when husbands do not enjoy a support system, role reversal becomes inevitable. They become wardens in the reproductive arena by providing for the fulfillment of the emotional needs of the family. Not only do they have to function as fathers but must become mothers too. The wife’s absence likewise deprives them of their sexual life. Sexual life is doubtlessly an important aspect of their male identity, but being deprived of its fulfillment does not necessarily mean the loss of masculinity. Rather, it brings about a redefinition of masculine identity.

Masculine identity, in the traditional sense, is deeply founded on economic and sexual dominance. This becomes shaky when the wife becomes the main provider. This condition may equalize, if not overrun, male superiority, power, and authority. This displacement requires men to view themselves in a different light. In the beginning, some husbands may resist being househusbands. They consider it as *natuok* since absence of the wife means they carry both physical and emotional pains. Nonetheless, they take it for the sake of the family, for love of wife and more importantly for the future of their children. For those who seem to have failed, consolation is sought in the company of other men, or in pursuit of political ambitions, or the spiritual life. Various survival mechanisms they employ put them in control—in control of the self despite conflict with in-laws, pressures from close relatives, or children’s opposition to them. The most precarious area, however, is their relation with the wife. By all means they must dispel their suspicion, set a rule, drink to forget. When the fears are not baseless, they may forgive or choose to terminate the marriage. If they themselves fall into the temptation, they gather all their strength to terminate the illicit relations and return to their families. Their arrival

at a state of certainty comes with the reconstruction of their identity. After all these, they remain as men.

Conclusion

Understanding the manner employed by men to live out and preserve new masculine identities led me into interweaving theoretical views. This implies that I viewed them from two perspectives: (1) the socialization perspective which shows masculine identity as framed by the local culture where traditional beliefs, values and norms are embedded in the male psyche in the process of growing up; and (2) the constructionist view which becomes more suitable because the men in this study are in a cultural system of values and beliefs which is getting relatively unstable as a consequence of globalized labor. To understand the men from a constructionist view point means that masculine identity must be considered as resulting from an active project. Rules that used to guide them in their day-to-day life seemed inoperative when they became solo fathers. This situation required a redefinition of their masculinity. Since they had to discover new rules for themselves, the redefinitions arrived at varied. Hence they also changed the monolithic nature of masculinity by living out as masculinities. Masculinities imply that their male identities are in constant flux. Their day-to-day life revolves around their being *ama ti familia* (father of the family) even if they are non-earners; master in bed even if they are non-providers of bread; well loved nurturers even if they are not emotionally demonstrative as the stereotype mothers. Masculinities, therefore, is as much a product of external influences and as a creation of individual choices. Since they go outside the bounds of the traditional male role they encroached into the female domain but remained men by being in control. The chapters dealing with the lives of men presented as cases led

to my espousal of constructionist view. The constructionist view emphasizes some elements to explain man's actions: class position, emotional state, personal motives, the understanding of the consequences of past and future actions. Confronted with critical situations, such as being househusband or having an erring wife, the men detach themselves, reflect, weigh their options, act, evaluate, react. In the end they do not lose themselves; they are in control. Many of the men in this study (MITS) want to remain as providers even when they earn less than their wives. Others are full-time househusbands. In both positions, the MITS maintain the masculine ideology—defined in terms of being in control. For them, performing their additional roles calls for the need to manage and endure additional burdens or suffering. In a way, their ability to handle their physical and mental pain is an indication of their competence in living up to the local norms governing male behavior. However, as these MITS assume the traditional female roles, they reappraise both male and female roles and in doing this, they redefine or reorder themselves in the process. This reconceptualization of identity, although framed within the local culture, remains an unfinished project. Since local norms conveniently cover only traditional gender relations, new norms emerge as the MITS actualize their reordered self. The reordering of the self is a continuous process because the setting they are in is already globalized. Even non-OCW households are globalized having been penetrated by Hollywood movies, MTV and other forms of entertainment, reshaping people's mode of thinking. When no less than a member of the family works abroad, the household's globalization becomes more intense. Lifestyles and aspirations of the family are influenced by the member who comes in direct contact with other societies.

Redefining Masculine Identity

How do men continue being manly when they are no longer the main providers, when they are not sexually active, or when they lose their legitimacy as the principal authority in the family? Arriving at a self-concept requires sensitivity within the relational level. Men are identifiable within a context—their relation with themselves, with their wife and family, with the community. Their identity as men is a product of their own interpretation and reconstruction of their histories. Their narratives are indicative of the choices they made in order to create themselves. They say *ammok ti luglugarek* (I know where I stand). Once they succeed in locating their position, they begin to interpret and construct meanings rather than take them as impositions of their cultural milieu. The succeeding portion discusses how men confront themselves as they try to fit into their condition of uncertainty.

The MITS may become more sensitive as they interact with others or as they react to in-laws. Because they are constantly watched by mother-in-law, they behave *de numero* or in accordance with the latter's expectation to deflect possible criticisms or censure. If they fall short of that expectation, conflicts are bound to follow—between him and his mother-in-law, between him and his wife. The critical attitudes of the mothers-in-law toward them are attempts at protecting their daughters, regaining filial devotion or simply wresting control of their daughters' earnings. By reporting on the husbands' incompetence or inadequacies, the mothers-in-law effectively disturb or erode the moral superiority of the men as head of family and in so doing assume an advantage to become the legitimate authority figure in the household. Naturally, their daughters will tend to believe them over their husbands. More faith on their mothers rather than on their

husbands was evident in Lanio's case. His own daughter photocopied the letters of her grandmother which contained fabricated infidelities and sent them to him. His wife's turning to another man is interpreted as her form of revenge. Despite the "betrayal" he was willing to forgive her. To avoid these malicious fabrications, he formed a chivalrous symbolic code. For instance, he ordered his house off-limits to other women including me. He volunteered to come to our house for interviews instead. He may have lost his control over his wife, yet he continues to exercise control and authority in the family. To earn a measure of respectability, he insists on observing a routine that puts him above suspicion thus further proving that his in-law's fabrications are groundless.

There are husbands who recognize the need to give their wives the space to become subjects that even the scheduling of when to come home ultimately becomes the woman's decision. Berting says, "*adda kaniiana*" ("it's up to her"). However, the statement may be a smokescreen to a seething impatience or anger on the part of the husbands who realize they have become powerless. Even those who say it mildly with a smile may prefer to keep that fact hidden. Husbands who do not convey any ill-feeling are those who proved to be competent husbands—where the decision of wives to remain working as a domestic helper is their preferred option and not an imposition of their economic situation because they, as husbands, can be the sole providers (Mario as skilled carpenter; Berting who drives his own tricycle and manages a large farm and all children finished schooling). Understanding the condition of husband-wife relationship gave me a clearer view of how masculinity is constructed. Greater access to this was possible when wives came home for vacation. Wives' narratives were more on their conflicts which brought them great anguish, while a few others relished the accomplishment of their dreams.

The hegemonic concept of masculinity consists of being providers, virile partners, and good fathers. With the migration phenomenon and the consequent reversal of roles, the concept comes under very serious threat. Some men are becoming increasingly aware of this challenge to their sense of manliness. Their wives assume a more dominant position as they gain wider access to higher paying jobs, designer clothes, and relatively expensive pieces of jewelry. This conforms to Hutheesing's theory (1995) that those who gain access to symbols of modernity, such as higher income, become the dominant spouse. Confronted with this threat, it becomes imperative for the husbands to rethink and reconstruct their concept of masculinity. For instance, role reappraisal requires men to look at themselves in new ways, arriving at new definitions of being men. They project the new masculine image in the form of efficiently managing the remittances, of remaining strong against temptation or of becoming responsive to the needs of the children. Hence, they become adept housekeepers, chaste spouses and maternal fathers. These are the characteristics that make them deserve love and respect, especially from their children. While these seem to be marks of femininity, the househusbands claim that since housework is endless they must have organization, precision, as well as physical strength. Doing laundry or attending to the needs of younger children plus other tasks require all these elements. As men they can handle these tasks as well, if not better than the wife.

Power Relations in the Productive Arena

The men in this study strongly adhered to the masculine ideology. To preserve their source of income is one outstanding tactic of masculinity. Driving a tricycle they themselves own is an aspiration and an economic exercise common among

husbands with OCW wives. Producing a side car was for Lanio an accomplishment; for Leo it is still a wish that his brother in the US could make possible; Rod drives his trike especially during market days since farm income is inadequate although he finds driving a tricycle more burdensome than farming. Others keep a more self-reliant attitude—not bothered even when their wives send no money at all. Ando operates the family sand and gravel business. Those who are limited to farming only compensate their inadequacy by maintaining their pride or *amor propio*. Jose does not demand much from his wife. He reasons out that his wife is in a strange land where she may have no one to depend on. Thus, she must always have money for herself and for emergency. In contrast, he and the children are surrounded by kin whom they can turn to, but only in extremely urgent situations. However, children's college needs seem to be more visible to Cecil. She reduces her time for religious obligations; instead she does overtime work to increase her earnings. This way she can continue supporting her children's education. Leo keeps to himself the pain and anguish inflicted by his in-laws; Abe prefers not to bother his wife by not telling her about the children's accidents which he thinks he can well manage.

When the long separation induces suspicions about each other's infidelities, Demy's adaptation to the situation takes the form of giving his wife a space—"letting her go." Her lengthening stay abroad is her choice. While Fely can already come home "for good," her husband knows that it will not mean "for good" for her. With him as the sole provider, he will feel constantly measured by an ever present wife, something he is neither confident nor comfortable with since his job as motorcycle repairer is not providing him enough income. In a way, by letting her go he opened up an opportunity for independent action for her and himself.

To other couples keeping their dignity is associated with the monetary. The regularity of income, such as one derived from driving a jeepney, earns Nellie's respect for Dan despite the fact that he earns less than her as a nurse. Dan avoids not driving even for a day because the family budget for the day comes from him and his wife's earnings remains untouched. Hers is reserved for future investment. Goyong's determination to assist his wife in raising nine children means he has to resort to many ways of gathering food to be served on the family table. Gathering shells from rivers, as well as collecting leaves and fruits from wild plants were previously done only by women but he does them since these do not require capital. All he needs is his labor and he can sell what the household can not consume to earn additional money for subsistence. Mario employs all his skills—carpentry and hog raising. Hog raising requires him to plant squash and *balangege* or *kangkong* to lessen the cost of feeds. Men's self-respect is preserved if they act as providers.

The above examples show that their confidence as men consists primarily in being economically productive. But even the full-time househusbands consider their being non-earners meaningful; they claim that doing the housework themselves instead of hiring a househelp reduces family expenses. For some, having a paid househelp is most absurd since a part of the wife's earnings as a maid will be used to pay another maid to care for the children. Doing the job themselves, although it may not be in keeping with the traditional male role, confirms their masculinity for they recognize that doing it means they are able to contribute to the family's financial as well as psychological stability. They claim that fathers do better in caring for their young than a distant relation.

The Sexual and Productive Dimensions

The family size associated with low income classes validates the local notion of masculinity that sex drive remains strong even among economically marginalized men. This is confirmed in this study. The centrality of the sexual need in man's life is graphically expressed by Art when he says *uray awan makanmi basta adda isuna* (even if we have nothing to eat so long as she is here). Once she arrives he plans to keep her passport so she will never leave again. For Bong the arrival of his wife is eagerly awaited. Absence of wife means sleepless nights. Indeed, husbands look much more refreshed and well-groomed when their wives are on vacation. They take a bath more frequently, their faces are clean shaven, they put on their better looking attire or try to avoid drinking. If they tend to resent being disregarded in decision making, they maintain their power over their wives in the area of sexuality. However, sexuality pivots around the productive self. When men become the lesser provider their masculinity is threatened. The wives recognize this.

Becoming the major earners inevitably makes the women the more dominant spouse since the desires and needs of family members, especially of the children, can be supported and pursued by the fund they remit. The determined avowal of a husband as "master" is negated by decisions of where the children must study or what course they should take because these depend on the remittances of the wife. A wife's submission to the husband in the sex act allows him to regain his dominance. The performance of the traditional sex role conveys to the husband his status as legitimate "master." The empowerment of some women due to their entry into the productive arena is sometimes translated into the sexual sphere. Men are becoming more conscious of their masculin-

ity when it is threatened by reversed roles. Sex as a primal force was previously taken for granted. Wife's absence made men more conscious of it. Some men rechannel the desire for sex into constant work. The wives recognize this, too. Sexual submission is their way of affirming the superiority of the husbands, thereby vindicating the husbands.

Many husbands are apprehensive of the thought of their wives' turning to other men. They hear stories about a lot of domestic helpers (DHs) with affairs although they are married. Gripped with this fear, some husbands speak of ways they can keep their sense of self intact. Goyong is determined to trust his wife. He keeps his sanity by trusting, instead of suspecting her. Jessie on the other hand threatens his wife by saying that the one who errs have no right over the children. But these two men differ—Goyong does not look for another woman to cater to his sexual desire. Jessie must find one because he cannot abstain for more than six months. Goyong comes from the working class, while Jessie is from a better-off family although he does not claim to be rich. But he has the means to avail or make use of the infrastructure by which a man can obtain pleasure for himself. He has money, owns a vehicle, and has a maid to attend to the children. In contrast, the other must scour all corners to feed his family since even his wife's earnings prove to be inadequate. The richer guy's capacity to employ those infrastructures show that the better-off have the luxury to balance their economic and affective interests while, for the other guy, the limits of the less fortunate are exemplified. The less fortunate wants to forget that need by getting drunk. It becomes his Sunday event. It is also his means of being in control. Being in control was manifested in a different manner by another husband. Bong enjoyed anonymity in a more urban setting where he carried an affair. He may have derived some pleasure from

it but as he became more involved with the other woman he feared that the consequence may be too much. So, before it got beyond his control he left her and rejoined his children even if it meant living in a farming community. As he looks back at this point in his life he terminated it because he realized that it did not make sense to his life at all.

The sexual domain, however, is no longer an area where men are always victors. Since women become the principal providers, they acquire a wider latitude of sexual freedom particularly with their stay in a society which allows them to enjoy a measure of autonomy. Their off-days are devoted to activities they themselves choose.

The traditional power and privilege of husbands as master of sexuality can be assumed by women. Two other husbands, Turo and Benny, went through a crisis of manhood when they were deserted by their wives. The crisis made them reflexive. They retrieved their manhood by becoming devoted fathers. Benny stated firmly, "it is not in relation to woman where one can show one's masculinity." Turo waited for many years, kept hoping his wife will return to him but she never did. Those waiting years finally made him realize that a woman is complementary to a man, a necessary partner in life. He cannot bear life without a woman. He takes another wife. He regains his self worth. None of his kin nor those of his first wife begrudge him this. He arrived at a new understanding of the other. He showed his respect to the second woman by waiting for her to decide when she was ready to go to him. But when she finally decided to live with him, he cautioned her that should she run into trouble with his children she should leave. This pronouncement expresses his determination to be the dominant spouse. This is the lesson learned from his experience with his first wife. He exercised his authority over his first wife by pushing her to go abroad to

sever her relationship with the other man; he suffered in return. This suffering, however, was counterbalanced by the image he projected to the community—his ability to avoid a bloody confrontation with the other man, a military man like himself. The sympathetic view the community has of him still does not make him complete. The arrival of the second woman completed him. He wants to ensure that his bitter past will not be repeated. So he reins in the second woman. With the first, he went through a reshaping of his gender identity. He was at her mercy. He patiently waited for her even when she stopped communicating with him. This waiting time made him submissive to his fate as a deserted husband. He kept hoping she would come back. It did not happen. With the second woman, he shifted to being in control. The value of male dominance in him seems to have remained in the unconscious; it resurfaced with the second woman.

Socialization ensures that masculinity operates in accordance with the prescriptions of society. In contrast, the consideration of gender as a social construction means that identity is accomplished in every situation. The redefinition of masculinity for Turo is an interplay of these two forces. He was socialized and assured that the male is the dominant spouse. His wife diminished that power when she refused to return to him after turning to other men. His readiness to forgive means subordinating himself to his wife. But he recovers his supremacy and control when he found another partner.

In contrast, Danny's refusal to take back his wife into the conjugal home because she also erred, is more an adherence to the appropriation of that space for individual choice. His refusal to take back his wife meant searching for that lost meaning of his life. Just when he thought he has already recovered from her betrayal, his wife suddenly returns to the

community and brings back his pain. In addition, some close relatives, including his sons, wished that he accepts her again. This makes him search for meaning and make sense of his situation. He tells himself he no longer loves her, he cannot live with her anymore. He wants to be sure he is true to himself. Yet he also loves the people who pressure him to accept her again. He goes through a reexamination of his life as he resists the pressure from close kin. The local culture also imposes a more strict standard on the woman—turning to another man is a serious violation of the marital relationship. He has forgiven his wife but he refuses to accept her again because he no longer loves her. For him, it is enough that he has forgiven her. He claims he is not bothered by the pressure he gets from close kin. His saying “no” is an affirmation of his new identity where he can live without his wife. Yet the redefinition of his masculinity on his own dictate does not exempt him from feeling divided. He is aware that his sons, who are growing into manhood and who are also arriving at their own notions of masculinity, are trying to reconcile them. He admits that they do not impose their wishes but he values and respects them so much. The reexamination of his life is directed to the achievement of the quality of a fatherhood that can match the ideals of his children. He not only redefines himself in relation to or in exclusion of his wife; he must also secure that identity in relation to his children, and most importantly in relation to himself. His masculine identity is, therefore, not merely determined by stable social and cultural codes. Danny does not simply interweave positively. He goes through the process where he seems to be in constant dispute with these cultural codes because they bind rather than liberate him. He no longer insists on clinging to the traditional male culture such as male superiority based on psychological or physiological characteristics. Non-accept-

tance of his wife indicates the primacy he gives to caring for himself. Since he cannot relate to one whom he no longer loves, he might only waste himself living with one to whom he cannot give and from whom he cannot draw that emotional requirement as a basic element. In the process he will only lose his self-worth.

Husbands' varied narratives point to the primacy of sex. But this is tied to their role as providers. When they become the lesser earners, wives feel they need to boost their respective husband's ego by allowing them the position of "masters" in bed. Since lower class men also do not have the infrastructure to employ for the gratification of their sexual needs unlike their richer counterparts, wives consider it their serious obligation to keep them dominant sexual partners. For men who coped with the long separation either through paid sex or affairs, they made certain that they keep these within reasonable bounds, not beyond their control. Hence, despite the double standard which makes men more privileged in this domain than women, husbands in this study realized that their inadequacy in the productive arena could be compensated in their becoming relatively disciplined in the sexual arena.

If enduring the long separation required exceptional qualities, husbands can also face an erring wife after re-examining the existing sexual norms. When confronted with this, they pursued any of these options: forgive and accept the wife, steadfastly remain single; or take another partner. Going into any of these directions required them to reflect on their lives, revising their beliefs in themselves as men, their needs and aspirations with or without a woman.

Hidden Sexuality

Some househusbands cannot be earners at all. Their children are young and no one can be relied upon to assist them;

there are no jobs available although they have skills; or they have been housekeepers even before their wives left. For these males, pride is maintained by not being obvious dependents—they do not ask from the wife, nor even bother to know how much the wife earns per month; they insist that the wife keeps an amount for herself, and they keep the family problems to themselves. Designated by culture as the head of the family, they are evaluated in accordance with the standards set by the local culture. The husband is expected to be the family's main provider, when he is not, adjustments are made accordingly. The wife takes the initiative of protecting the husband's image as head of the family, if only to save him from ego depletion. This is borne out by the study. Wives work out a series of pretenses proving that decisions are made by husbands and that they are subordinated to them. Nellie comes home just to settle family problems as when her husband gets into conflict with her own brother. She made sure that it was settled by her own husband's moves and decisions. Cecil submits to husband's sexual overtures, making him feel he is her "master". Other wives ask for their husband's approval before they recontract although they have already indicated their wish to continue working abroad.

Families subjected to poverty experience powerlessness. However, this study focused on the relational or the private dimension rather than on marriage as an institution. The recognition of poverty as the major cause of migration forced me to look at marriage as a relational process. Poverty pushes men and women into a condition of powerlessness but surviving the exploitative structure implies that they stretch the space available in the relational process. When wives become absent, husbands' psychological needs and sexual pleasure are withdrawn for some time which could last for several years. This kind of deprivation is muted because ideologies of mar-

riage in the locality, particularly that of the working class, revolves around the economic well-being of the family which parents believe is secured by providing education to their children even to the point of sacrificing their very own comfort and happiness. Providing material security seems to be a more urgent aim which consumes them to the extent that their emotional life at times gets neglected. Lacking any source of emotional replenishment, they seem depleted. As a result of the emptiness, some of the husbands become inadequate nurturers, they become hot-tempered towards their children, or they withdraw from family life to hide their lost vitality. This particular state is usually kept hidden surfacing at times in jokes. They merely crack jokes which may provide some relief but at times sound like derision which further bruise their egos. Hence, the need seems to be pushed into the unconscious—a deadened state follows. They become insensitive even to their own needs. But the arrival of the wife revives the need; some claim it is their right. To a wife like Cecil who is taught by her new religion to submit to her husband as an obligation, she claims that she is able to maintain her feelings towards her husband by constantly recalling the memories of their earlier years.

Nellie, a nurse, is different from the rest of the wives. She definitely earns more and comes home every six months. Hence, Dan's state of deprivation is shorter. Even his misunderstandings with his in-laws do not make him miserable for long because Nellie is able to intervene by coming to his rescue. Still, he is not made to appear so unmanly. He always appears, with the support of his wife, as the one responsible in settling family problems. The two project an egalitarian relationship. They also prove that a relational process is easily managed in the economically better-off household. If there is mutual respect, sexual relations improve.

For some couples however, the politics of the kitchen and that of the bedroom are hardly interrelated, as shown in the cases of Demy and Fely, Zandy and Tonet. The violations committed by husbands against them as wives remain in their consciousness. Becoming major earners gives them the legitimacy to detach themselves from their husbands although they may not always withhold themselves physically. They perform the sex act as an obligation, pretending to derive pleasure from it. The husbands on the other hand feel their wives have become less accessible. While before permission to engage in sexual intercourse was not asked, this is no longer the case.

This distancing of husbands and wives is also obvious among couples where the husband simply waits for the arrival of his wife without meeting her at the airport. While some are not explicit in their reasons, others imply that it would save a little or they cannot abandon their domestic duties. I strongly suspect an unstated reason considering that these are not spontaneous answers. If asked about when they will see their wives, the question may only be answered with silence. It further makes an impression that they are in control of themselves, especially in handling their sexual need. Or they may not even be sure about how they feel, they may have lost that eagerness towards each other having been used to the long separation. Instead, they would say that a wife is used to travelling alone and can go to the bus terminal directly from the airport.

The more visible changes observed among returning wives is their manner of dressing when they go out. A few husbands may be seen with their wives in commercial areas. The wife looks more at ease with her trendy get-up, the husband looks like he is not comfortable at all even if he is wearing clothes brought home by the wife. The discomfort may be due either to their attire or the strangeness that comes

from internal changes both may have gone through as a result of their temporary separation. The wife has shed her rural ways and gone urban and the husband tries to adapt to her ways.

Husbands decline invitations to social events, where the social standing of their wives looms larger than theirs such as when their wives are *ninangs* or sponsors in baptisms and weddings or outings of OCWs on vacation. These events are perceived as privileges of their wives. To be asked to be a *ninang* is recognition of high social status, or for having arrived in the social scene. As for those coming from another country and becoming dollar earners, a higher status is conferred on them, hence, invitations become frequent. Outings along the river are also common; this time, however, their destinations are places like Fort Ilocandia and more classy resorts where entrance fees are required. Outings may be done at night where they can enjoy listening to music bands. These activities are usually declined by the husbands. Having stayed with employers belonging to higher social status, wives have imbibed practices characteristic of a modern society. Since they have stayed abroad for years, these rituals have become part of their lifestyle. The husbands, however, are seldom integrated. They insist in performing their routine of everyday life, reasoning that after all their wives need to relax—they came to rest. Some, however, feel bad about it; they cannot demand leisure from them. By becoming major earners, wives seem to have been conferred the greater right to choose their form of leisure. Husbands who became undemanding spouses hide their very own sexuality, their being men. It is a form of control over their masculinity.

Hidden sexuality implies that repression is men's form of being in control. They cope with the long separation by behaving as the passive, at times, submissive spouse. Yet it looks

like a graceful survival mechanism. Their days may be uneventful. Their behavior do not draw out the attention of neighbors. They enjoy some measure of peace and equanimity as they continue their day to day life.

“For Children” Ideology

This study examined how the husbands performed the role of tending the children. The outcome of their parenting becomes more obvious as children become grown-up, compared to the stage when they were still below school age.

Fathers in farming communities tend to view children as potential assistants and inheritors of the farm. The children's early realization that a basically farming household means a hand-to-mouth existence turns them away from farm life. The mothers make some dreams possible by working abroad. Yet, for some who went through college the difficulty of finding a job makes them entertain the idea of following the footsteps of their mothers, particularly in the case of the daughters. They become D^Hs, too. The sons go into seamanship programs and other technical courses to increase their chances of finding work overseas. If the fathers are college graduates and are employed in the formal sector, children tend to be better guided in choosing a profession. Moreover, since there is not much change of roles in the children, they do not get confused in planning their future. Sons can be like their fathers, daughters can be like mothers who may be teachers but temporarily on leave from their profession being employed overseas as househelpers. The confusion is more likely to occur where fathers do not even work in farms since they did not come from farming households. They are strangers in the place or they have non-farming skills. They become problematic for their sons since their identities are nebulous examples to follow. They are confined to housework although

they have technical skills which are not in demand in a rural setting.

Fathers who are college educated tend to be better models for children. Danny is respected by his sons. They excel in the field where he also excels in. He is a mathematics teacher in the elementary level and his two sons also specialized in the same subject except that they are at the tertiary level. Although he drinks heavily, his sons did not acquire the same habit since discipline, inner strength, being true to one's self and independence were learned early. So even when Danny remains unreconciled with his wife, the sons maintain their respect for him.

The *malalaki* (macho men) also strive to earn children's respect. They curb their undesirable habits. Benjie's confinement to domestic life and becoming a non-earner denies him of gambling opportunities. Zandy checks himself in relating with other women since he believes that a daughter might later on pay for his debts. In some families where children have been used to fathers' drinking, bonding and respect seem less attainable. Bancio's form of machismo, especially manifested when drunk, is violence towards his wife before she became a DH and later on to the children when she became an absentee wife. It is his form of appropriation of authority and control over them. Sowing fear is not his way of disciplining them because he does it only when drunk. When sober he is gentle to them, and, in fact, does the cooking even when his two daughters are of age enough to be doing it. His tendency to violence when drunk is his way of venting anger and frustration over the self-deprivations he goes through owing to his wife's long absence as well as carrying the burden for the survival of the family since wife's support became uncertain. His eldest daughter often sneaks out a sack of palay to sell when he is not looking because she knows

she will be penalized only when he is drunk. Jose's sons also started drinking with their *barkada* but could have picked it up from his drinking habit. Eventually, these fathers lose their authority over the children, some of whom no longer respect the former and refuse to comply with their orders to assist in farm work.

Their machismo seems to be a manifestation of their insecurity in relation to their wives. Their wives have an edge over them—Shiela's parents who are in Saudi partly shoulder their needs; Tonet's uncle provided them a wide lot on which to build their house at a very low price; Ely earns much more than an ordinary DH in Hong Kong since she can pose as a Chinese national with her proficiency in the language and can work part time. But she has problems with her husband, Dong, particularly with his political ambitions. She evaluates her husband only as a good speaker, not as a doer. She blames Dong for neglecting their house which is damaged by termites despite his being a carpenter himself. Instead, Dong seriously pursues his political ambition to the point of mortgaging the land purchased by Ely. The prestige he earns in serving the community assigns a measure of legitimacy to Dong's control over the resources acquired from his wife's labor. Ely believes that her husband's political ambitions wasted all her earnings and resources. Since he squanders money for nothing, his mother-in-law thinks that even his sons acquired the same squandering tendencies from their father. Such observation is shared by their neighbors who say that "a tree will bear its own fruits." Their sons did not take their schooling seriously despite all the money that they had received from a US pension and their mother's abundant remittances. Money came easy for them. They associated father's love for them with money. Their failure in schooling dismays Ely. She looks at it as her husbands' failure, too. He admits

his sons' failures but that it is not totally his fault. He says his sons misbehaved because of peer group influence. Hence, Dong's political adventure is a reclamation of his masculine identity and superior status in the community after subordinating himself to his wife. His acceptance into a respectable politicians' circle makes him regain his self-esteem. As a barangay councilman, he looks after the welfare of his sitio. People ran to him for assistance. This gives him some measure of respectability and self-worth. But having failed in many of his wife's expectations, he detached himself from her and went into "hiding" when she came home briefly.

Children's recognition of the mother as the principal provider comes in the form of bonding with her. Fathers who feel they have maintained their authority over their children do not feel the need to compete with the wife in gaining children's loyalty. In contrast, fathers who do not feel confident as a consequence of their demotion to a minor provider withdraw all the more from the family members. Their isolation is not only manifested in alcohol addiction but also in allowing the children to live on their own with the least supervision. Hence, the "for children" ideology is not integrated into their way of bringing up their children. When husbands detach themselves from the family as their way of coping with their wife's absence, the sons tend to leave the house more often to find company. Moreover, the absence of mothers requires the children to participate more actively in house work. Daughters tend to be less resistant to this demand than the sons. The sons tend to resist their fathers by staying out frequently. Some fathers also come home late and drunk, a habit that the sons may acquire. This lessens the bonding between fathers and sons. However, the isolation of fathers from the family breeds independent personalities. Fathers are not affected by teenage woes,

dadakkeldan, *adda nakemdan* (they are now grown up, they have their own already), they say. Likewise, the children prefer to leave their fathers alone who are still able to fend for themselves.

I arrive at the conclusion that masculine identity is redefined as a consequence of the changing conditions of the men. Confronted by economic difficulties husbands and wives decide and agree that the wife becomes an earner and consequently, the long separation is entailed. Redefinition comes about as husbands go through self-examination due to added or changing tasks and to conflicts with their wives either induced or further complicated by meddling in-laws. Mothers-in-law, more than anybody else, continue expecting their sons-in-law as the providers, loyal spouses, and good fathers. Husbands of OCW wives are measured by more traditional standards; mothers-in-law watch them, imputing that their daughters' efforts are beyond their normal roles; they tend to become critical of sons-in-law. Their displeasure, fabrications or belittling of their daughters' husbands are their assertions of the expected male role. Hence, no matter how well these men perform their house duties, or how well behaved they are as sexual partners, or how affectionate they are as fathers, these do not guarantee that they can earn the esteem and respect of their mothers-in-law. The husbands' acceptance of their new functions already makes mothers-in-law to look down on them. As young wives they respected and held their husbands in high esteem because they were the providers; this made the men the legitimate authority in the family; they are *ama ti pamilia*. Now, if a man cannot live up anymore to that standard for it is their own daughters who now assume that role instead, these mothers-in-law begin to feel that their daughters are short changed. They can not accept this sort of man. Responding to the demand for women

overseas reverses the position of the wives from nurturers to providers. The object of scrutiny also changes but the watchful eyes are still that of mothers-in-law. In the past, it was the daughter-in-law who was watched and measured by the mother-in-law in her quality as housekeeper and her fidelity as wife to ensure that her son got the best wife. Thus, in the past, the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law conflict was very common. Now, for the OCW households, it is the other way around. It is now the son-in-law who is intensely watched by his mother-in-law who is dismayed that he is an inadequate provider; and with that inadequacy it is her nagging feeling that her daughter did not catch the best husband.

The changing conditions of the men in this study did not only require psychological adjustments to conform to the gender role norms. It required revising the role norms as well. The rules that they reformulate to guide them in gender relations presuppose a reexamination of their own values and aspirations, those that would make their lives meaningful. Thus, they are not just behaving within the confines of externally established controls; instead, they draw from their own as they reorder their own life. This is the process they go through as they reformulate their masculinity. They depart from their traditional notions of the masculine because continuing to conform makes them feel personally inadequate and insecure. I consider the shift from being a main provider to that of a nurturer as a radical change in contrast to that experienced by wives who were left behind during the previous periods, particularly during the first wave of migration in the early 1900s. Wives were left occasionally as when husbands went to the mountains to tend to their *kaingin* (upland farms) for a week or more. In contrast, the current globalized labor forces men to become househusbands for long periods. It took sometime to recognize the effects of the first wave of

migration in Ilocos. Female primness and spinsterhood were only later associated with the gender imbalance due to the exodus of men (Pertierra: 1992). In the same manner, it may also take some time before the effects of the absence of wife to be more clearly discernible. It is visible enough among husbands who resist female functions since they resort to drinking, although they were not drinkers before. Or they may have been mild drinkers turned alcoholics.

Among the men who became willing participants in this study I discovered that there is an interplay between the productive and sexual dimensions. Since most are in their peak years, diminution in one area does not necessarily weaken the other area. While the wife becomes the main economic provider, as househusband he becomes the main nurturer. These husbands derive satisfaction in performing this role. Power drawn by women from the economic sphere is limited to decisions pertaining to family investments and those related to their children: It does not necessarily get translated into the sexual sphere. Power is negotiated. For instance, some husbands may remain dominant in the sexual domain or spouses may maintain an egalitarian relationship. Some wives may downplay their empowerment by giving deference to their husbands, that is, they remain submissive in the sexual sphere as well as in other domestic arrangements. They orchestrate the making of a decision subtly so that it will appear to be that of the husband since they choose to maintain the previous order of power relations despite their changing roles. This finding is in agreement with Connell's observation that male dominance persists in Western societies despite the resistance articulated in feminist movements. In this study, while OCW wives have adopted a liberal lifestyle in the countries they are working, they still maintain a submissive stance in dealing with their husbands. Wives continue to

respect their husbands as long as the latter remain as providers even if they earn less. Husbands can do this if they have a support system composed of their in-laws, their own mothers or other kin. Moreover, husbands become able nurturers if they have a devised compensatory mechanism to handle their sexual deprivation since they themselves must also be emotionally stable to sustain the emotional needs of their children. These conditions maintain the smooth relationship placing the husbands in a self-constructive process.

Men who fall under the opposite category, the self-destructive, are those who suffer from conflicts with in-laws, those who face financial difficulties especially when the wife is remiss in her obligations, and those who enter into liaisons to survive their sexual deprivation. The primacy of sex drive becomes more pronounced due to the long separation. Separation either strengthens the marital bond although in some cases the bond is shattered after a betrayal of one or both parties. This angle is confirmed by Connell's (1995) position that the reproductive arena is a major structure in organizing gender relations. The men's capacity or incapacity to handle their sexual deprivation maps out how their in-laws look at them. For the *naibtor*, the more enduring husbands, their sexual deprivation is handled by sublimating all their energies to work and caring "for the children." The less enduring men become heavy drinkers, neglecting their work and their children. The more enduring men do not resist female tasks. These become vital mechanisms to keep them in control. Being efficient house managers and good fathers constitute their *kinalalaki* because no matter how great the inner conflicts they confront, they remain in control of that self. Many househusbands may have resisted female tasks at first but they compel themselves to eventually confront these tasks because these also test their being men. This is how

they reappraise themselves. This study reexamines Hollnsteiner's view (1981) that men resist role reversals because housework forms most of a woman's identity. This study disputes Hollnsteiner's thesis since housework did not feminize men. They remain masculine even when they become househusbands. They maintain the hegemonic masculinity which requires them to be in control. To be in control means that they arrive at an identity that commands respect for fear from others depending on where they are in the *kinalalaki*–*malalaki* continuum. In their wide playing field, they have a range of choices in undertaking the active project. At one extreme, *kinalalaki* is seen in the preservation of their source of income; in becoming self-reliant even without wife's remittances or keeping them untouched; in maintaining their dignity and worth by not expecting much from their wife; or keeping their pain to themselves; or in showing mutual respect through their giving each other enough space. On the other hand, others are *malalaki* since evoking fear from others is their means by which they can be in control. A man's carrying an illicit relation maybe viewed as *kinalalaki* or *malalaki*. His action may be tolerable if he is in control—he exercises a sense of autonomy by entering into it or getting out of it on his own volition. If the betrayal comes from the wife, he can display *kinalalaki* if he keeps his cool, grants sincere forgiveness or totally detaches himself from his wife or her family of origin. For some others, they are *malalaki* if they disregard demands of reason and instead seek solace and comfort in alcohol.

Connell foresees the dismantling of hegemonic masculinity in the West since dominance of men is challenged by more visible tactics used by women. In the Philippines, as indicated in this study, men strive to maintain their hegemony because they feel that their power gets eroded if they

do not recompose their masculine identity. Furthermore, their wives, although empowered, still regard them as the dominant spouse. Masculinity is power. For the men in this study, it is guaranteed by self-esteem, by self-worth derived from a meaningful life with the realization of family ideals such as success of children.

Recomposing masculine identity is an active project. The active project keeps them reconstructing that identity by unpacking their old time elements gradually or radically. Sometimes it needs to be repacked rapidly in keeping with the wife's pace or gradually in keeping with the local culture's absorption of external elements. Hence, their identities are in constant reformulation. When they were still the only provider of the family, they were sure of themselves as *ama ti familia*. When the wife was still around they were sure of their maleness. It is not only their identity that is reconceptualized, but also the norms by which they operate. They realize that these are no longer suitable to their altered situation. They go through a personal crisis. A number were able to evade a state where there is a paralysis of the will which more likely happens to men amidst their crisis. Some found solace in revisiting their religion. Turning to the Bible is not something men in the locality automatically do in times of crisis. These are creative reactions. While they may not have moved away from their oppressive class position, they are able to work out their liberation at the relational level. They become reflexive. Reflexivity is a consequence of their being globalized. Due to the increased demand for women, globalized households emerged even in kin-based agricultural societies. They are therefore enmeshed in contingent factors that may be predictable or unpredictable so that the consequences of their actions may also be uncertain. This makes the redefinition of their masculine identity a continuing process since they are

refashioning it according to their own contingencies. Starting to emerge are varied masculinities: Some men remain guided by the traditional masculine code, some break away from it in keeping with their new roles. In both directions, they are making a choice.

Finally, examining the long term effects of migration phenomenon on family life, particularly men becoming solo fathers, requires a longer period of study. While I concluded that norms and values governing migrant families are in flux, it takes future studies to verify what these are specifically, such as how these operate in their children when their turn to build their own families comes. They were brought up by solo fathers grappling with rules that at times run contrary to the events where these were made to apply. Hence, to describe or explain action by beliefs and values that are still being reformulated at present, may still be premature. As these rules become more defined in social practices other researchers can take on later.

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