

“Male Providers” and “Responsible Mothers”

Gender and Livelihood Politics in the Rural Philippines

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Abstract

This article explores the links between rural livelihood change and gender identities and relations in the Philippines. To bring the feminist and agrarian scholarly agendas closer together, I present ethnographic accounts from Naga City, Bicol, to examine how daily discourses and practices of livelihood change are implicated in (re)producing social identities along gender lines, as well as class and geographical lines. The first part of the article presents the ways in which gender is constituted in the state policies and programs governing agrarian change. Drawing on policy documents and interviews with state officials, civil servants, local academics, and NGO leaders, I note how state practices and policies both influence people’s tendency to diversify and are imbued with inherently gendered discourses. In the second part of the article, the location and scale of analysis shift to one location expressive of these official discourses: Pacol, a small farming community located on Naga’s peri-urban fringe. By working through ethnographic accounts provided by households in Pacol, I examine how state-fed gendered discourses are (re)enacted during livelihood diversification and (re)produced in intra-household activities, decision-making processes, and other quotidian performances.

Keywords

Philippines, gender, agrarian change, rural development, livelihoods

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Introduction

In recent decades, the Philippine agrarian landscape has been shaped by a number of dramatic transformations. Burgeoning urban centers and increasing educational and nonfarm employment opportunities have run parallel with political instability, crippling foreign debt repayments, ineffective agrarian reform policies, and a shrinking of the state's reproductive function, leaving people in rural areas to cope in various ways. One important strategy employed to negotiate these changing political economies has been to diversify away from farming as the main source of income. Indeed, most farming households in the Philippines now meet their basic needs, minimize risk, and/or generate surplus through multiple income sources and occupations. For example, husbands and wives typically engage in vegetable gardening, driving, or vending, alongside farming. This process of livelihood diversification raises a number of important questions: Why do people pursue the livelihood strategies they do? Where do their ideas come from? Who pursues them? And what do they mean to the interests and identities of those residents involved?

In this article, I examine these questions using ethnographic material from Naga City, a medium-sized city in Bicol, Philippines. Drawing on data collected at two sites in Naga, I point to the gendering of livelihood strategies that emerged as significant during the research, and in doing so, join a growing body of post-structural and feminist scholars dedicated to understanding discourses, practices, and performances, as “productive” of gender identities, rather than simply “reflective” of them (Osborne, Segal, & Butler, 1994; Haraway, 1997). This theoretical framework, though applied to studies of natural resource management (Angeles & Hill, 2009; Arora-Jonsson, 2009; Elmhirst, 2007a; Harris, 2006; Nightingale, 2006; Resurreccion & Elmhirst, 2008; Sundberg, 2004), migration (Silvey, 2000), and the industrial labor market, manufacturing, and service sectors (Ong, 1990), has scarcely been adopted to agrarian change, and certainly not the process of livelihood diversification earlier. Instead, scholars interested in the gendered politics of livelihood change have tended to naturalize gender by interpreting livelihoods as simply roles that women and men take on (Eder, 2006; Ellis, 2000; Kabeer & Van Anh, 2000), rather than activities constitutive of social relations.

My goal in this article is, therefore, twofold. The first is to emphasize the inadequate, or at least outdated, attention to gender relations in previous models of livelihood change, and to spell out some of the implications such integration may bring. The second is to point to the ways in which this may be done. Without overlooking the differences generated by class, age, and other important axes of social identity, I present two case studies from Naga to demonstrate how gendered subjectivities *come into being* through the livelihood trajectories forged through changing political economies. In doing so, important fresh perspectives are offered on the previous “structural” approach to gender and agrarian change.

Situating Livelihood Diversification, Theoretically and Geographically

Since its inception in the 1960s, the field of Agrarian Studies has struggled to keep up with the dramatic global changes characteristic of the post-colonial era, and the major shifts in intellectual concerns accompanying them (Rigg, 2006). Initial studies dominated by classic Marxist ideals gave way in the 1970s to less essentialized accounts of agrarian change and structures, and these alternative Marxist political economy studies did shed some light on the evolving links between “peasant” production and wage labor (Bernstein & Byres, 2001). However, an air of stagnancy still characterizes many aspects of the agrarian change literature, from issues of migration and social equality, to livelihood change. As such, nonfarming activities continue to be viewed as temporary and/or contingent ones, “add-ons” to the main business of farming, or cards dealt in times of severe economic strife.

The sociocultural dimensions of livelihood diversification are a particular case in point. When subject to investigation, research responsibility has largely fallen to economists, who have tended to conflate income- and livelihood-diversification and conjured up static notions of the household as unitary and apolitical spheres, a concept long since contested by feminists interested in agrarian change (Agarwal, 1986, 1994; Carney, 1988; Kabeer, 1991; Sharma, 1985). On the few occasions when gender has been acknowledged as a dimension of difference, livelihood diversification has been analyzed as a site of struggle over contested

resources, and scholars have sought to determine the impacts on women and men (Eder, 2006; Ellis, 2000; Kabeer & Van Anh, 2000). While important, this approach has naturalized identities by interpreting livelihoods as simply roles that individuals take on; therefore, defining gender as fixed social relations and in doing so precluded from analysis the myriad ways in which subject identities are themselves at stake during livelihood decisions and activities, both within and beyond the household.

Nearly two decades have passed since Joan Scott (1988) made the point in her brilliant introduction to *Gender and the Politics of History* that gender—in the sense of knowledge about the multiple and contested meanings of sexual difference—is neither given, fixed, nor confined to the household, but invoked and contested in a variety of institutional arenas as parts of other struggles for power. This extended definition of politics is now one of the central insights of feminism, and arguably contains the key to moving beyond the essentialism and inertia implicit in previous “structural” approaches to livelihood change, a challenge I modestly take up here. Following the theoretical lead of Judith Butler (1994) and other feminist and post-structural scholars committed to understanding how gender identities are constituted “in the action of knowledge production, not *before* the action starts” (Haraway, 1991, p. 29), I illustrate how gender not only shapes people’s access to and experiences of livelihood change but is itself (re)configured in the process.

Situating Livelihood Change: Geographically and Theoretically

Located approximately 6 km from the center of Naga City, the village of Pacol has a population of 8,849 and has been an important locus of agriculture since the seventeenth century. Traditionally, the focus of extensive sugarcane, coconut, and vegetable production, Pacol actually takes its name from a variety of banana that once grew in abundance there. Over the last two decades, however, its landscape has taken on a different dimension. Once highly productive sugarcane and coconut farms have been converted into gas stations, flower plantations, and newly-girded

fields of subdivisions, and where farming once dominated production activities, nonagricultural livelihoods have gained ground.

Whether the general shift away from agriculture is the outcome of necessity or choice is difficult to ascertain. Local labor force surveys and censuses provide little insight, and efforts to interpret the data on employment trends rest upon some fairly strong assumptions. Likewise, there are no comprehensive data on historical trends in local landholdings. The only longitudinal evidence available consists of panel data on land conversion applications, obtained from the municipal office of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR). These data show an increase in approved applications since 1990, when the city government first converted 15 hectares (ha) of sugarcane plantation into an urban poor resettlement. Since then, over 125 ha have been legally converted into middle-class housing estates, cockpit arenas, and other nonagricultural forms, while unauthorized land conversions have taken place at a fast, undocumented, pace.

Census data collected by the village council also demonstrate the declining importance of agriculture in the local labor market. Only 17.1 percent of men in the village are now estimated to work solely as farmers (Table 1), the majority undertaking unskilled labor and/or tricycle driving instead. Meanwhile, the range of primary livelihood sources adopted by women is even more varied than that of men. Although 65 percent of women in the village are still officially categorized as "housewives" (Table 1), most now partake in some form of income generation, many combining an artisan activity, such as hair-dressing or tailoring, with animal husbandry and trade in daily-use goods. Moreover, although the lack of historical data inhibits statistical analysis of long-term employment trends, interviews with village elders suggest a "strengthening" of these patterns over time. In other words, in recent decades men's employment opportunities have contracted, while those of women have increased in both range and financial significance.

How can we understand these differentiated livelihood patterns? They cannot be explained in terms of material conditions alone. Certainly, access to capital, resources, and labor markets plays a crucial role in the realization of new livelihood opportunities. Yet as I will illustrate, questions of agency, identity, gender, and class relations also come into play. In fact, they are constantly in flux and always at stake.

Table 1. Gender-disaggregated Management of Livelihood Activities (%)

Livelihood Activity	Men	Women
Unskilled laborer	34.2	1.3
Farmer	17.1	0.3
Private employee	16.5	10.7
Driver	10.7	0
Government employee	3.9	4.5
Store owner	3.5	3.5
Unemployed	3.5	0.2
Flower planter/vendor	3.0	2.0
Skilled laborer	2.5	0.3
Overseas contract worker	2.3	2.7
Mechanic	1.2	0
Buy and sell trader	0.5	1.8
Housewife	0	65.1
Other	1.1	4.2

Source: Census data, Pacol Village Council, 2007.

While an antiessentialist approach to subject formation and representation creates a greater degree of fluidity and flexibility than a “structural” theoretical framework, it does not entail a “facile view of identity as easily taken on or willfully discarded” (Nelson, 1999, p. 5). Rather, the subject is understood as “constituted through language and disciplinary practices that are dynamic, constantly changing, yet time- and place-specific” (Sundberg, 2004, p. 46). Indeed, as Judith Butler argues (1993), it is the repetitive performance of particular normative discourses that produces gendered bodies, thereby (re)producing gender as social norms.

Before delving into the gendering of livelihood diversification at the household scale, then, it is important to trace the (re)production of gender in other institutional and disciplinary sites. The role of the local state is particularly important here. In development circles, post-structural feminists have long challenged the assumptions made with respect to the “neutral” role of the state in development. Accepting the state not as a technical or material entity, but as a plurality of discursive forms (Yeatman, 1990), they have underscored its very implication in marginalization, be it through its institutional organization, policies, and/or

implementation practices. Generally speaking, these critiques have focused on the tendency for development projects to be predicated upon Western pretensions of modernity, wherein neoclassical economics and evolutionism are invoked to provide “failsafe” prescriptions for Third World development (Marchand & Parpart, 1995). Demonstrating that these mainstream constructions subsume, segregate, and essentialize “Third World” women, they have called for a more contextual and pluralized approach to gender, which recognizes the multiple axes and identities that shape their lives, and grants them greater access to the decision-making and cultural discourses that determine their position.

In recent years, these debates have been taken up by a number of feminist scholars interested in processes of “development” and “modernization” in Southeast Asia. Several have analyzed how definitions of “womanhood” and the family are actively promoted by the state (Hart, 1991, 1997; Ong, 1990), and how global restructuring and flexible labor are impacting on women as they are seen to negotiate negative stereotypes, or on families as mobility and female labor force participation challenge so-called “Asian family values” (Chant & McIlwaine, 1995). Others have applied recent scrutiny to masculinist “man-as-provider/oppressor” representations, building on a growing body of literature dedicated to men’s vulnerabilities or the so-called “crisis of masculinity” (Clever, 2002; Elmhirst, 2007b; Jackson, 1999; Ong & Peletz, 1995). This literature focuses on how neoliberalism and the global feminization of labor, coupled with development projects that essentialize women as providers, all serve to disrupt the historical connection between provider identities and adult masculinities.

As this analysis will demonstrate, these findings echo resoundingly within Naga, where larger political–economic forces, notably state-fed gender discourses, are crucial to understanding differential access to and experiences of livelihood activities, as well as the meanings attached to gender identities. In the paragraphs that follow, I draw specific attention to the heteronormative discourses of male responsibility and women’s rightful position in the home presently being impressed by the local government in Naga, before going on to examine how these become (re)produced, maintained, and unsettled in daily conjugal relations in Pacol.

Methods and Methodology

To explore the gendering of livelihood change in Naga's diverse institutional and geographical sites, the methodology underpinning this research drew on a variety of ethnographic techniques. Analysis and understanding of how state policies and practices are implicated in (re)configuring gender identities was obtained through baseline data, policy and legal documents, and semi-structured interviews conducted with civil servants, government officials, local academics, and NGO leaders.

In the second stage of fieldwork, the lives and livelihoods of Pacol's residents were investigated through working primarily with 10 households, purposefully selected on the basis of their recent attempts to diversify, which means that most of these 10 households were not financially well-off. Approximately three semi-structured interviews were conducted with both women and men members of these households to assess their differing experiences of livelihood change. Questions asked during these interviews touched upon a variety of livelihood-related topics, including the economy of households, the adequacy of state development programs, the means by which families cover deficits, and their personal and collective experiences of livelihood projects. The insights gained from these interviews and more general observations were followed up in four focus groups, held separately with the women and men. The participants were also asked to fill out livelihood journals, listing their daily activities during a typical week, and the women respondents provided an economic breakdown of the familial budget over the course of a month.

Given that the researcher was a white, nonnative woman, unfamiliar with the local language, it is important to note that these interviews and focus groups were reliant upon the skills and availability of a translator, a process that introduced its own problems and politics. Over the three months, the fieldwork became littered with translational "slippages," and unequal power relationships were formed: between individual participants, the participants and myself, the translator and myself, the translator and the participants. Nonetheless, regular meetings with the translator, and open-ended (semi-structured interviews, involved observations) and reflexive research methods (ethnographic notes) were

undertaken to try and create more meaningful, productive, and collaborative research spaces.

Official Constructions of Gender: Male Providers and Responsible Mothers

Situated in the agricultural region of Bicol, Naga was geographically advantaged during the colonial eras of regional specialization. Under Spanish and American rule, the city became an important hub of *abacá*, a species of banana native to the Philippines harvested for its fiber, and coconut production, producing nearly half of Philippine exports in *abacá* by the end of the nineteenth century (Eviota, 1997, p. 40). Following post-WWII independence and especially the Martial Law era (1972–1986), Naga’s reliance upon agriculture was also crucial to its political–economic downfall. Under the Marcos regime, the pernicious effects of political cronyism (unproductive state investments, ostentatious spending, burgeoning foreign debt, decline of subsistence agriculture and tenancy relations, and landlessness) hit the region hard. Because coconut-growing and *abacá*-growing areas were not covered by national land reform, Marcos and post-Marcos cronies were able to closely control surplus extraction in Bicol, and hence influenced poverty levels. To this day, the region remains one of the most economically depressed in the country, with poverty and hunger placed at 68.3 and 55 percent, significantly higher than the national levels of 39.9 and 34.5 percent (Naga City, 2007).

These historical trends in political–economic relations have significantly shaped the recent development trajectory of the local government of Naga. In the last few decades, local authorities have addressed the previously sluggish labor market and economy by directing resources away from the rural productive sector toward the international financial system and service industry. Facilitated by the political–economic autonomy opened up through the 1991 Local Government Code, and supported by national and international donor assistance, the local state has encouraged growing numbers of service and retail companies to establish themselves in Naga, enticed by generous tax breaks, infrastructural amenities, a streamlined recruitment service, and other

business-friendly incentives. Telecommunications, financial, and retail corporations such as SM Mall, China Banking Corporation, and Philippine National Bank have all been attracted to Naga through such incentives. Situated predominantly in the urban “core,” these industries now employ 70 percent of Naga’s labor force and drive the city’s impressive 6.5 percent annual economic growth (Prilles, 2000, p. 216).

On the other side of the political–economic coin, local state reductions in expenditure outlays on agricultural extension services and other infrastructures, together with inadequate agrarian reform, have left the rural agricultural sector struggling to cope. Although no official statistics exist, poverty affects a disproportionate number of rural residents (Prilles, 2000), who rely on livelihood diversification and migration to meet their subsistence needs. By the late 1990s, statistically recorded migrants made up 40 percent of Naga’s population, and migration was estimated to account for nearly 80 percent of its population increment (Prilles, 2000, p. 216).

Concerned with escalating levels of urban congestion, and other social dislocations that have accompanied urbanization and industrialization, rural poverty and inequality have featured heavily on the local state’s policy agenda of late. In response, the government has adopted the policy rhetoric of “alternative livelihood sources,” underscoring the need for nonagricultural employment and the move away from farming as a primary means of support. Gender has figured prominently in this process. On the basis that poverty alleviation and the promotion of balanced economic growth require the enhanced productivity of women in low-income households, state strategies have increasingly encouraged the expansion of women’s “alternative” income-generating options through better access to micro-credit and skills training. In contrast, men are still seen as “farmer-breadwinners” in state discourse, and remain the principal recipients of agricultural assistance.

These agrarian policies, and the gendered and class-based discourses with which they are imbued, play an important role in shaping individual’s lives and livelihoods. Despite the best of intentions, increasing state regulation of the agrarian sector carries risks as well as opportunities for the women and men concerned. Designed to assist women in “juggling” multiple responsibilities, livelihood policies in Naga strongly assume clear gender roles and identities. Women’s presence and affectivity in the

development process is associated with domesticity, or as one senior manager from the city's employment and livelihood office put it, livelihood activities "come easy to women because they are an extension of the home." Imbued with a sense of ahistoricity and informality, state programs also advocate women's role in livelihood diversification, while simultaneously devaluing their work. Instead, their income generation is likened to hobbies, time-fillers, or "alternative" livelihood activities, rendering them economically and politically obsolete.

The guidelines attached to micro-credit act as a further disciplinary mechanism, constraining women's livelihood options in various ways. The magnitude of micro-credit and lack of state investment in credit co-operatives only enable the domestic production of marketable goods that can be sold in the city and its vicinity. The activities promoted have low productivity and returns, seldom generating enough income to finance technology that might lead to more profitable ventures, particularly when competing with the influx of cheap imports. And although trainings are offered in bookkeeping, capital build-up, savings mobilization, and a plethora of other issues pertaining to "professional development," the skills and information required for venture into less "stereotypical" livelihood pursuits remain strikingly absent. A key feature of many of my conversations with women "micro-entrepreneurs" was frustration at not being able to "follow through" with their livelihood ideas.

Local state welfare policies, such as the Women's Welfare Program (WWP), are also implicated in the problematic representation of women's rightful position in the home, both as "reproducers" and pacifiers. According to the Women's Development Agenda, the state directive that forms the ideological core of all programs geared toward women's "needs" in Naga, a woman has five major duties: (a) to be a loyal supporter to her husband, (b) to be caretaker of the household, (c) to produce future generations, (d) to raise her children properly, and (e) to foster peace and harmony in the home and community (Naga City, 2007). Through the city's domestic violence agenda, the current vanguard of the WWP, women are also designated as archetypal victims of violence, freezing them into "objects-who-defend-themselves," men into "subjects-who-perpetuate-violence," and society into the powerless (read: women) and powerful (read: men) (Mohanty, 2003, p. 24). Or, as one civil servant generalized, Naga City's gender and development policies "proceed from the fact that there is no equality."

This naturalization and essentialization of gender relations was also reflected in the attitudes of other city staff members. According to one recently departed city councillor:

A harmonious household is a great contribution to development efforts... Women ensure that when their husbands come home from work they find peace and happiness at home. The children are also healthier and happier.

Stated during a private interview, this official's comments symbolically separate domestic and public spheres, suggesting that women have primary responsibility at home. They insinuate that women are under the shelter and authority of their "provider" husbands, a relationship reified by the top-down "hand-out" nature in which welfare services are distributed by the local state, and they infer that women are accountable for peace and harmony in the home. When combined with the "gender-sensitive" (read: women-centric) livelihood programs previously outlined, these discourses point to the model of "responsible" motherhood recently promoted by Naga's state government. Through this focus on both welfare support and income generation, women have become what Molyneux (2006) refers to as "conduits of policy" in Naga, or a channel through which improvements in the well-being of the family is expected, which carries very real risks of burden.

For male citizens, local agrarian policies in Naga are no less essentialist, nor problematic. Although women have primarily been targeted for livelihood and welfare support, development policies are still founded on what R.W. Connell (1995) terms "hegemonic masculinity"—a form of masculinity occupying an elite position in a pattern of gender relations. In terms of rural livelihoods, the most insidious expression of this perspective lies in the creation of agricultural programs geared almost solely toward the needs of men, and in the masculinist attitudes of city staff. When I asked about the male bias in agricultural support, a senior city agriculture office (CAgO) employee replied, "Men are the heads of the family. They own the land... Women help, but men do the heavy work." In further discussions with city staff, more references were made to the notion of "hegemonic masculinity," to the assumption that providing for a family is part of what it is "to be a man," and to the cultural amplification of male strength in both the allocation of tasks and the capacity for hard work.

Hierarchically gendered identities are also produced in village political structures and agricultural programs that rest on nuclear, male-headed households. Moreover, while in principle women are not excluded from formal party politics, in practice they play a peripheral role in village political affairs. Their involvement is largely limited to participating in welfare and livelihood programs (health, education, nutrition), and religious activities, while women leaders in these organizations are also rare.

While promoting these principles of male responsibility and authority, the urban-biased development model adopted by the city has left poorer men in rural areas ill-equipped to put them into practice. Instead, inadequate state investment in the agricultural sector, combined with persistent landlordism, rising inflation, and other natural and anthropogenic trends that continue to dampen agricultural productivity, has ensured that local development has become biased against their needs.

By assuming that all men are beneficiaries of modernization, state policies have also ensured that money, and hence "alternative" livelihood opportunities, remain elusive for many poorer men. Most of the programs offered by the CAgO involve the "lending of material inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, and infant livestock. No cash involved" (Naga City, 1999). Those requiring credit are referred on to the city's Metro PESO employment and livelihood office and its "gender-sensitive" agenda. I asked the same CAgO employee what this entailed:

Well, I have spoken to colleagues at Metro PESO. Women can apply for assistance, technology, marketing assistance, financial assistance. The city government really tries to help women... They take care of the money.

[She candidly continued her gender analysis.] They tell me that women receive more loans because they do not have vices. For men, there are lots of vices, they can gamble, they can drink...

These comments highlight the general conflation of "gender" with "women" in the city's development policies, and the institutionalization of culturally elaborated and historical perceptions that women are more practical and financially astute than men. While government documents state that at least 50 percent of the beneficiaries of "socioeconomic" programs are women (Raquid-Arroyo, 2003), numerous conversations with city staff about women's "exemplary" budgeting skills raised

significant questions about its underestimation. By uncritically glorifying women's budgeting skills and ensconcing livelihood projects as women's "turf," these official discourses risk undermining men's activities and hence "provider" responsibilities, while placing added responsibility for survival and mobility on women.

Steeped in the liberal tradition, these local state discourses are also in danger of depoliticizing needs. Focused on the "universal" condition of citizens ("practical" needs—micro-credit, health status, education), rather than their position ("strategic" needs—power over decision-making and the cultural discourses that determine their position), development projects in Naga seem to favor efficiency, instrumentalism, and "fundability" over pluralism and contextuality. In other words, by reifying gender and other social relations as "outside" the development debate, they naturalize women's and men's "roles" and divert attention away from the oppressive assumptions implicit in local institutional structures.

What have been the consequences of these policy prescriptions and assumptions for those subjects? How do these gender-differentiated structures of opportunity and risk influence the livelihood choices of poorer women and men, and the kinds of agency they can exercise? This is, of course, a complex subject. Policy does not always turn into practice, and unintended consequences abound; however, these official invocations do shape the terrain of debate on which people assign meaning in their everyday lives.

Open to Negotiation: Gender and Livelihood Politics in Pacol

Why have men in Pacol turned to limited, sporadic employment as construction workers or drivers to supplement or replace their earnings from farming? And why are women becoming increasingly involved in more varied and complex forms of income generation? As previously noted, answers to these questions cannot be found in material conditions alone. What is also crucial is the official interpellation of men as providers, and women as responsible mothers, as outlined earlier.

In Pacol, the notion of male responsibility, or “hegemonic masculinity,” is crucial in shaping the kind of work that men do. In public discourse, it was common for men to invoke their capacity to provide. On my visits to households, they would often intrude in conversations in which I was engaged with their wives and ask them to make tea while they “took over.” Sometimes, they would also enhance their answers by contrasting their “capability” with the apparent “vulnerability” of their wives. At other times, they would invoke the symbolism of the gendered public–private divide, or devalue their wives’ activities as temporary or unskilled, to make themselves and their work look superior.

In doing so, these men were attempting to give the impression of male responsibility and superiority by drawing explicitly from the official discourses outlined in the previous section. Yet, the persistence with which they did so suggested more tenuous masculinities were at stake. Indeed, further interviews identified several factors preventing poorer men from achieving this ideal, from limited agricultural support, to bad weather and unfavorable tenancy arrangements. Over time, many farmers admitted to owing large rent arrears, to defaulting on debts for machines, fertilizers, and other inputs, and to feeling vulnerable to changes in job prospects and the price of basic goods. They complained that subdivision development had led to the interruption of irrigation supplies, causing water logged or desiccated soils, and that the recent typhoon activity had severely damaged their irrigation facilities.

While farming was identified as inefficient and unprofitable, non-farming livelihoods were found to be no less elusive for many men. The following exchange is taken from a women’s focus group, and highlights some of the problems men in Pacol now confront in accessing non-farming livelihoods:

Virgie: You know, men are known to be strong and if they fail, people will think they are weak...men are afraid because of their ego. They will be humiliated if they fail.

Researcher: Can you think of any specific examples of this? When men are afraid?

Paulina: Yes, just like if they need to borrow money. The men will tell the wives to borrow money because they are shy to approach them...

Throughout the research, many women admitted to borrowing informally on behalf of their husbands. They also admitted that their husbands only ventured into new income-generating arenas once they were assured of the financial rewards. A conversation with a local moneylender suggested that the need to appear financially afloat sometimes forces men into concealing their borrowing from their wives. She also reiterated the findings obtained from local officials and the focus group that the gravity of poor men's inaccessibility to financial support is exacerbated by the cultural caricature of their irresponsibility with money.

Other data confirmed that the targeting of women in state livelihood programs has meant that more "formal" borrowing is also inaccessible to many men. Local government records suggested that, since 1994, only 11 percent of micro-credit beneficiaries in Pacol have been male (Naga City, 2007), while in interviews men frequently lamented the personal and social obligations tied up with government assistance. Behind many of their anxieties lay feelings of frustration at being dependent on, dominated upon, and denied access by local power brokers to "state-led" development.

The local notion of "hegemonic masculinity" was not the only form of masculinity restricting men's livelihood choices either. The perception that masculinity must be expressed through ideals of heavy, arduous work was also highlighted as problematic to poorer men. In many cases, men's tendency to couch their descriptions of their daily activities in terms of sweating, perspiring, and other bodily functions designed to "prove" their manliness subsided to admissions of exhaustion. Several described days in which they had ploughed the fields on water and coconut juice alone. Others' postures hinted at the physical demands inherent in their work. Farm machinery is still relatively uncommon in Pacol, and workers' postures often reflected the hauling, lifting, carrying, and squatting consequently incurred.

Whether through inadequate access to financial assistance and labor markets, or an unwillingness to do "lighter," less "manly" work, local concepts of masculinity seem to be coming at a price to poorer men in Pacol, rendering them vulnerable to livelihood change, and perhaps even subject to the so-called "crisis in masculinity." Evidence of this kind of "crisis" was reflected in their continual reference to "poverty" as a means to justify their wives participation in income generation, or as one man

stated during a male focus group discussion, “So many women are now working because of poverty, especially if their children are going to school...if they will not help the husband, they will suffer, the husband cannot provide all the needs of the family.” The existence of a “crisis in masculinity” was also illustrated in their persistent tendency to devalue their spouse’s livelihood activities as unprofitable and insignificant.

Interestingly, the women showed no outward desire to challenge these problematic representations. On the contrary, they also positioned their livelihood activities as supplementary to their husbands’ and to their other reproductive responsibilities. When questioned about the benefits of their own income generation, for instance, female participants also tended to devalue their contributions by referring to the “petty cash” it had brought, or by insisting it was only feasible because it could be combined with child care and housework. When questioned about the household head, all of the women referred to their spouses, and many were adamant that their husbands were emotionally “stronger” than them too, adding that as women they were more prone to anxiety and indecision, including that associated with poverty.

During these occasions, both women and men were drawing on normative gender discourses to give the impression of male responsibility and authority, but whether these performances were illustrative of patriarchal relations is again doubtful. The personal frustrations of failure to provide for dependent family members that gradually crept into many of the men’s voices certainly threw their claims of authority into doubt, while examination of the household “balance sheets” suggested men’s incomes failed to cover even food costs, let alone housing, education, and other basic needs. These household accounts also showed women’s incomes to be much greater than their oral accounts afforded, typically covering about 60–70 percent of the household earnings and making them the main or even sole breadwinners in their families.

Keen to understand the apparent contradiction between ideological expectations and material realities, I raised the data obtained from the household accounts with my female research assistant during a heady discussion over lunch. Clearly upset, she remarked, “being a wife is not very simple, even if it is not as hard as being a husband...If I don’t eat it’s ok, but I cannot just look at my kids if they are hungry. But for men it’s ok, they are not easily troubled...” While clearly these difficulties

cannot be ascribed to all of the women interviewed, her remarks point to the sharp disjuncture between generalized notions of male responsibility and finding the means to prepare the next meal that many women in Pacol now confront.

During my time in the village, I became acutely aware of the heavy reproductive burdens women now bear. Methodologically, this meant that meetings had to be scheduled around meal times, and that coconut would be grated and beans shelled as questions were fielded. In terms of daily lifestyles, women typically worked from 6–8 a.m. to 6–11 p.m. unpaid and from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. paid, while men worked only paid from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Women thus generally work far longer hours, the majority combining housework and child care with income generation, culminating in 90-hour weeks.

Perhaps unsurprising given the number of hours worked, child care and domestic duties were revealed as a great source of mental and physical stress for the women. Respondents explained that their husbands' work (where this existed), although physically demanding and perhaps riskier, was easier than theirs in the sense that it entailed thinking and doing only one main type of activity. They regularly expressed concern at how their hectic schedules caused them anxiety and fatigue, and their lifestyles made them feel spatially "bound," as they had to conduct the majority of activities out of the home.

Given the work burdens and associated anxieties women face, why is there a tendency for them to reinforce their position as mothers and wives. Why the ambiguity surrounding their income contributions? And why did women equate income generation with being able to buy personal treats, when the "balance sheets" revealed their activities cover much more basic needs? Answers to these questions undoubtedly relate to how the "responsible" mother has been institutionalized in state discourse as both a household caretaker *and* "alternative" income generator. Whether it was expressed through improved school grades of their children, or being able to throw parties for family and friends, women's self-esteem did seem to be tied to their ability to be at the center of the family and fulfill all domestic duties, while still earning an income and/or running a business.

This representation of "responsible" motherhood is only part of the picture though, as the ways in which men have been coping with industrialization, urbanization, and the concomitant labor displacement must

also be considered. Chiming with Rebecca Elmhirst's (2007b) study of masculinities in Lampung, Indonesia, my research uncovered a number of means by which poorer men have been attempting to reassert their masculinity and challenge women's autonomy in the wake of unemployment and agricultural decline. Aside from devaluing their wives' income generation as unprofitable, they have taken to dominating decision-making, drinking, and perhaps even engaging in aggressive sexual behavior, to bolster their sense of manliness. Meanwhile, though men showed signs of doing some domestic work, even boasting to me on occasion that they were good cooks, their involvement tends to be limited to the less time-consuming projects (such as drying the dishes and making the bed), and they explicitly pointed out that it did not "belong" to them. Finally, in interviews men were not wary of clarifying what an imbalance to these assumed gender roles would bring. Many insisted they would leave their wives if they failed to fulfill their reproductive "duties," or if their activities encroached upon their own "provider" roles, whereas for women, marriage was demarcated as a less secure arrangement, as the following excerpts illustrate:

If the wife does not cook, the man will immediately hurt her, so there would come a time that the man will leave and they will separate.

Women take care of the families. If the wife is not a nagger, the family will be at peace.

I don't want to decide on anything, because men just don't want to be disempowered. If they will see that we don't consider their decisions, they will look for other women who will depend on them... Yes, they will separate if the woman doesn't know how to submit to the husband.

These comments resound with other feminist studies of gender and interpersonal violence conducted in the Philippines and Southeast Asia (Brickell, in press; Elmhirst, 2007b), in that women's need to foster harmony and not directly challenge unequal gender relations is clearly related to threats of conjugal violence and fears about the breakdown of the family unit. Perhaps significantly, women's need to foster harmony extended beyond the household as well, intersecting in important ways with notions of charity and responsibility for poorer neighbors, family members, and friends. Several of the women drew analogies between their capacity to maintain domestic harmony, on the one hand, and their

role in promoting village harmony through their generosity in providing opportunities (low-interest loans, food, and even parties) for their neighbors. Interestingly, these notions of responsibility are perpetuated by state policies that place the onus for domestic and community harmony on women, even when other aspects of the public sphere (i.e., political governance, economic provision) are discursively treated as wholly male domains.

Due to these potential concerns and risks, my findings revealed that women go to great lengths to maintain the semblance of normative gender relations, and hence assuage the shaky gender identities and associated “crisis in masculinity” brought on by livelihood change. Some confessed to deliberately downplaying their income contributions, and even concealing their earnings from their husbands, hiding money in kitchen jars where they knew it was unlikely to be found. Others admitted that their tendency to represent their income activities as ad hoc, “supplementary,” and in vague terms was a tactic by which they could make claims on their husbands’ labor and time, because as one woman noted, “if your husband [knows] you have money, he will no longer strive to work.” Later interviews hinted that women are actively renewing official representations of femininity and masculinity to cope with economic insecurity because to acknowledge a man’s authority, they suggested, was also to demand that he fulfill his financial responsibilities.

Actively exercising normative notions of femininity was highlighted as advantageous to women in other ways as well. Reinforcing their cultural positioning as “supporters,” admitted several women, equipped them with a greater degree of occupational and financial flexibility than men’s “provider” identities would allow. As Virgie stated during a focus group discussion, “women can face failure without being ashamed,” or as Regina noted on a separate occasion, “[I]f I fail, what’s the big deal? At least I’ve tried.” Given the “women-centric” imperatives of government micro-credit projects, and women’s rather peripheral position in masculine power structures of the village, women have been better placed when it comes to financing their livelihood activities too. All 10 women who participated in this study had obtained loans under the city’s “alternative” livelihood program, and most supplemented them by borrowing informally from neighbors and/or by becoming members of private lending groups active within the area.

This article may seem pessimistic, since I have detailed the problems that residents in Pacol now face. However, on a positive note, it also indicates that women are tactically performing gender roles to meet their practical needs (making men fulfill their minimum responsibility as “providers”). And both women and men are both perpetrators and victims of gender discourses, while at the same time perceiving themselves as victims of these discourses. In other words, increasing state regulation of development in agrarian communities may be problematic when it is imbued with normative constructions of the “male provider” and “responsible” mother, but both women and men are able to prize open official power structures and discourses when opportunities and subjectivities coincide.

Concluding Comments

In this article, I have sought to emphasize the need to integrate gender relations into studies of agrarian change, and to do so in a way that enables understanding of how gender identities are brought into being and enacted in time and place. By analyzing data through a post-structural lens, I have demonstrated how rural livelihood diversification can offer moments in which gender relations are unsettled and (re)produced in a multitude of institutional environments.

Central to this thesis is the role of state institutions in mapping ways of life in agrarian communities that are gendered as well as classed. Indeed, this analysis has illuminated just how and why official discourses of the “responsible” mother and “male provider” are so problematic when they are (or are not, in the latter case) hitched to poverty agendas. In agrarian communities, where cutbacks in state spending have been particularly acute, these sorts of discourses risk increasing women’s work responsibilities, while pitting men against women, or worse still alienating men from the development process altogether. By construing persons as rational, predictable, and readily manipulated objects, they also screen out those dimensions of human agency that involve the construction and deconstruction of social meanings (Fraser, 1989).

While larger configurations of political–economic forces—including gendered discourses—undeniably define the terrain of struggle on which

livelihood diversification takes place, they certainly do not rule out women and men's own agency. On the contrary, the findings from this study have illuminated how individuals can actively exercise these discourses to mediate the shaky gender relations that livelihood change has induced. For instance, official representations of male responsibility may be problematic for poorer men when not backed up materially, but men can still galvanize these discourses and other representations of femininity to reassert their sense of masculinity. Meanwhile, women are not without their own discursive devices either. Principles of male responsibility may be problematic when they are so closely tied up to men's self-esteem, but they may offer women some room for maneuver and a means to make claims on their partners' labor and time.

For gender theorists interested in the relationship between wider policy discourses and their materialization of social identity in everyday life, the empirical substance of this article has also provided further food for thought on the translatability and mutability of normative discourses. Faced with the need to acquire food and basic supplies and, for men, to fulfill what is culturally expected of them as "providers," this analysis has demonstrated that people in rural areas may actively renew normative discourses to mediate the shaky gender relations induced through livelihood change. Rather than offering a simplistic reading of rising masculine vulnerability and female opportunity in the context of economic insecurity and the feminization of labor, it thus tells a more complex tale, in which people use a combination of banal and extreme means to at least maintain the appearance of conventional gender relations.

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