

Gender Relations and Household Economic Planning in the Rural Philippines

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This paper lies at the intersection of the considerable scholarly literatures on household livelihood strategies and on the role of women in Southeast Asia. Focused ethnographically on rural Philippine households engaged primarily in various combinations of fishing and farming activities, and analytically on how gender relations figure in the decisions that the co-heads of these households make regarding their economic plans for the future, it considers how the livelihood diversification that characteristically accompanies rural development affects – and is in turn affected by – the conjugal relationship.

In much of rural Southeast Asia today, single-income households organized by a sexual division of labour around one core economic activity, such as fishing or farming, have largely given way to households characterized by multiple income sources and occupations, such that the co-heads of a household often pursue occupationally distinct economic lives. For example, the male co-head may engage in vegetable gardening while the female co-head operates a small store, and so on. Within particular households, diversification of economic activities and associated occupational multiplicity often develop over the course of a household's developmental cycle, such that in a household that begins with only a single economic activity (for example, farming), other economic activities are subsequently added (fishing, a business enterprise, and so forth) as the household develops and matures.

This last observation raises some important questions about intra-household decision-making processes over time: Where do ideas for these additional economic

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activities come from, who pursues them, and how is it decided which particular activity to pursue next? In short, there are significant economic planning questions here that go to the heart of the notion of 'household strategies' and the question of the degree to which households do in fact 'strategize' for the future.

The rural Philippines presents a good opportunity to explore such questions. Philippine households are typically pooling households, where women share control over household resources with men, and many households of even modest economic means do devise and attempt to implement economic plans for the future involving occupational diversification.¹ Further, the co-heads of these households can be quite explicit in response to questioning about their plans. Thus, they may describe a strategy for investment or an image of where they would like the household to 'be' in, say, five years; for example, by adding a motor to a fishing boat currently powered by oars, by fencing a distant parcel of land so that cattle may be run on it, by developing a hog-raising enterprise, and so on. That households can and should engage in such planning for the future, if they are to prosper – specifically, that they should have a *plano* – is in fact an important local notion, but of course to say that many household co-heads can articulate such plans when asked is not to say that they will eventually implement those plans successfully.

Making the Philippine case of particular interest is the fact that husbands and wives, as household co-heads, are culturally said to share – and typically do share – household planning responsibility.² Yet husbands and wives may have different notions about how best to proceed. Hence the first question explored in this paper: How does gender figure in the notions that household co-heads hold regarding what is best for a household's economic future?

Now it is widely said – indeed, it is emphasized – that for a household's *plano* to be successful, the co-heads must discuss and agree to it, implicitly acknowledging that male and female co-heads often do have different initial views. It is also widely said that at least on some occasions, this needed husband–wife discussion does not take place, at least not to the satisfaction of both parties, and some household co-heads attempt to (unilaterally and unsuccessfully) implement a plan, and to draw upon pooled resources, without the agreement and cooperation of the other. Hence the second question explored in this paper: By what process of discussion and negotiation are the separate and sometimes conflicting gendered notions of household co-heads regarding 'what's best' for the future melded into a common household plan or 'strategy'?

Answers to these questions bear on a broader debate regarding the relative validity of unitary and collective models of the household,³ a debate that revolves in part around

1 See, for example, Miriam S. Chaiken, 'Economic strategies and success on the Philippine frontier', *Research in Economic Anthropology*, 15 (1994): 277–305.

2 Jeanne Frances I. Illo, 'Who heads the household? Women in households in the Philippines', in *The Filipino woman in focus: A book of readings*, ed. Amaryllis T. Torres (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1995), pp. 235–54.

3 Harold Alderman *et al.*, 'Unitary versus collective models of the household: Is it time to shift the burden of proof?', *The World Bank Research Observer*, 10 (1995): 1–19; Gillian Hart, 'Gender and household dynamics: Recent theories and their implications', in *Critical issues in Asian development: Theories, experiences, and policies*, ed. M. G. Quibra (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 39–74.

conflicting views of how best to theorize the relationship between individual preferences and household behaviour. By exploring here, in a particular ethnographic setting, the role of gender in this relationship, this paper fleshes out some of the empirical dimensions of the 'cooperative conflict' that Amartya Sen characterizes as intra-household decision-making.⁴ In so doing it provides additional evidence for the considerable role of women in household enterprise and economic innovation in rural Southeast Asia.

Background

Households in Southeast Asia

In recent years there has been considerable anthropological enthusiasm for the study of households, both on the grounds that they are interesting entities in their own right and in the belief that such study may provide the key to articulating individual and wider system levels of analysis. Situated between rational actor or psychological approaches on the one hand and structural determinism on the other, household-based approaches offer to mediate disparate but equally important levels of analysis in a way that privileges the decisions and actions of people.⁵

However, the emergence in anthropology of something akin to 'household studies' has also helped demonstrate that these ubiquitous social units must not be reified or taken for granted if we are to understand how households generate and respond to wider patterns of economic and social change.⁶ Instead, we must pay careful attention to what goes on inside them, examining in the process how such crucial variables as age, gender, authority and principles of behaviour influence the interests and activities of individual members – interests and activities that may sometimes conflict.⁷ It has also become clear that as households move through different stages of the domestic cycle, individual interests and activities often do diverge. This finding has led some to conclude that households have less of the corporate character traditionally attributed to them, and others to worry that at least for some purposes, the household is an 'extremely problematic concept'.⁸

4 Amartya Sen, 'Gender and cooperative conflicts', in *Persistent inequalities: Women and world development*, ed. Irene Tinker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 123–49.

5 Andrew W. Davidson, 'Rethinking household livelihood strategies', *Research in Rural Sociology and Development*, 5 (1991): 14; Richard W. Wilk, *Household ecology: Economic change and domestic life among the Kekchi Maya of Belize* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991), p. 31; Diane L. Wolf, *Factory daughters: Gender, household dynamics, and rural industrialization in Java* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 13.

6 E. Paul Durrenberger and Nicola Tannenbaum, 'Household economy, political economy, and ideology: Peasants and the state in Southeast Asia', *American Anthropologist*, 94 (1992): 86. For household studies, see, for example, Robert McC. Netting, Richard W. Wilk and Eric J. Arnould, *Households: Comparative studies of the domestic group* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

7 Peggy F. Barlett, *Agricultural choice and change: Decision making in a Costa Rican community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Richard W. Wilk, 'The household in anthropology: Panacea or problem?', *Reviews in Anthropology*, 20 (1991): 1–12.

8 Peter Laslett, 'The family as a knot of individual interests', in Netting *et al.*, eds., *Households*, pp. 353–79; Benjamin White, 'Problems in the empirical analysis of agrarian differentiation', in *Agrarian transformations: Local processes and the state in Southeast Asia*, ed. Gillian Hart, Andrew Turton and Benjamin White (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 22.

Nonetheless, there remains considerable agreement about the nature of households in general: they characteristically engage in some combination of production, distribution (sharing, consumption and so forth), biological and social reproduction, management and transmission of resources, and co-residence. True, the variety of specific morphological forms that households may assume complicates matters of definition. In Southeast Asia, for example, households may be composed of nuclear or extended families, they may be male-headed or female-headed, and so on. In any case, the shared, quasi-corporate nature of a household's characteristic activities is the diacritical feature.⁹

These same attributes also help account for the broad acceptance of the household as the most appropriate unit for the study of socioeconomic differences and changes, both in general and in the Philippines and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.¹⁰ Indeed, calling attention to the 'remarkable congruence' between the social organization of family households and the practice of smallholder farming, Robert Netting argues that the same sorts of contingencies that drive agricultural change also make the household a more central social institution than ever.¹¹ Certainly this congruence, and the complex web of interrelationships between households and agrarian change that it entails, has stimulated much productive research in Southeast Asia.¹²

Such research has been powerfully influenced by the fact that households in the region are characteristically composed of families. The kinship and family systems that predominate in Southeast Asia differ significantly from those in East Asia and South Asia, particularly with regard to bilateral inheritance, nuclear family structure and the status accorded to women.¹³ The familial nature of households powerfully influences the manner in which they function as productive enterprises, especially as regards the transmission of environmental knowledge, task skills and modes of labour organisation.

Viewing the farm household as simultaneously an enduring social group and a productive enterprise has led to much stimulating comparative research on how households work in different cultural settings.¹⁴ It has also led to a needed critical re-examination of some of the assumptions that have guided research about how such households work. Particularly relevant to the case material below are several strands of this re-examination, all loosely addressed to the earlier-noted notion that households have identifiable livelihood 'strategies'. One principal criticism of previous household

9 Robert McC. Netting, *Smallholders, householders: Farm families and the ecology of intensive subsistence agriculture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 59, 100–1.

10 Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *Everyday politics in the Philippines: Class and status relations in a central Luzon village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 63; Wolf, *Factory daughters*.

11 Netting, *Smallholders, householders*, pp. 60–1, 101.

12 Gillian Hart, *Power, labor, and livelihood: Processes of change in rural Java* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Hart *et al.*, *Agrarian transformations*; Benjamin White, 'Production and reproduction in a Javanese village' (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1976); Diana Wong, *Peasants in the making: Malaysia's Green Revolution* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1987).

13 Wolf, *Factory daughters*, p. 56.

14 See, for example, Philip C. C. Huang, *The peasant economy and social change in North China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985) and *The peasant family and rural development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350–1988* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Robert McC. Netting, *Balancing on an Alp: Ecological change and continuity in a Swiss Alpine community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

strategy research is that it has shown an uncritical tendency to merge analytically the individual and the household, thereby treating both the household itself and the individuals within it as identical and interchangeable. As however, Diane Wolf observes, households do not decide things, people within households do – and more particularly, certain people, as opposed to others. More often than not, household decision-making involves complex processes of domination and resistance between genders and generations, and at the very least, it can not simply be assumed that the interests of the household head are the same as those of less empowered household members.¹⁵

In a related vein and however household strategies are formulated the individual orchestrating the strategy is often assumed to be a male, a sexual bias scarcely appropriate to research on rural household organization in Southeast Asia.¹⁶ A further and equally unfortunate tendency has been to extrapolate household strategies from observations of completed actions, rather than from consultations with individual household members about their own reasons for their behaviour. In any case, the term ‘household strategy’ should not be taken to imply the necessary presence of neatly planned and rationally implemented behaviour by members of a household group. For this latter phenomenon the narrower local notion, elaborated further below, of a household *plano* is useful; for if it is true that many households do not actually strategize or plan for the future, others indeed do make such plans. The term ‘household strategy’ is hence employed here more simply as a broad and convenient rubric to refer to the varying economic activities of households, deliberately planned or not, as their members respond to the changing circumstances around them.¹⁷ A larger aim is to extend the notion of household livelihood strategies generally beyond day-to-day survival or ‘coping’ strategies to include longer-term plans and ‘projects’ and the historical, political, economic and cultural influences that determine people’s notions about these matters.¹⁸

Gender roles in the Philippines

The prominent role of women in daily economic and social life in Southeast Asia has been much commented on, and the observation that gender roles are relatively egalitarian is a frequent touchstone in the ethnographic literature on the region.¹⁹ Certainly with regards to the Philippines, a long and distinguished tradition of empirical research attests to the prominent role of women in the household economy, both by direct involvement in income-earning activities and as managers of household economic

15 Diane L. Wolf, ‘Does Father know best? A feminist critique of household strategy research’, *Research in Rural Sociology and Development*, 5 (1991): 14–15; Wolf, *Factory daughters*, p. 15.

16 Wolf, ‘Does father know best?’, p. 33.

17 Daniel C. Clay and Harry K. Schwarzweller, ‘Introduction: Researching household livelihood strategies’, *Research in Rural Sociology and Development*, 5 (1991): 5–6.

18 Phyllis Moen and Elaine Worthington, ‘The concept of family adaptive strategies’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18 (1992): 235; Edsel Sajor, ‘Upland livelihood transformations: State and market processes and social autonomy in the northern Philippines’ (Ph.D. diss., Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, 1999), p. 29.

19 Tania Murray Li, ‘Working separately but eating together: Personhood, property, and power in conjugal relations’, *American Ethnologist*, 25 (1998): 679.

resources.²⁰ More is at stake here, furthermore, than control over the family ‘purse strings’; egalitarianism in domestic relations and democratic consultation between spouses on matters of labour allocation and expenditure are frequent themes in the literature on Philippine households and gender relations.²¹ Addressing household headship in the Philippines in particular, Jeanne Illo argues that:

authority in the home, the Civil Law of the Philippines notwithstanding, is not solely vested on the husband-father; rather, it is one which he shares with his wife. Data on decision making within the home, contribution of the woman to the care and organisation of the household, as well as the local communities’ recognition that the woman has the power to revoke her husband’s commitments, all suggest that the concept of a singular, male household head is indeed an illusion which is perpetuated only in law and in other formal institutions.²²

Gender relations that may appear relatively egalitarian at one level, however, may be differentiated in practice, and several observations caution against uncritical acceptance of this generally positive view of the position of women in Philippine households. One is the persistent association of Filipino women with the domestic sphere, which necessarily impinges upon their involvement in extra-household economic affairs; another is a tendency in the literature to view Filipino women in comparison to women in other societies rather in comparison to Filipino men.²³ Most significant for this paper, however, are alternative and more critical studies and perspectives that suggest the presence of considerable female subordination and disadvantage in Philippine households and wider Philippine society. Granted, for example, men often do hand their wages over to their wives and women are typically keepers of the family purse. Yet the amount of money held by women in poor households may be insufficient to cover even basic needs, leaving them struggling with money shortages and little opportunity to make major economic planning decisions, and many women at all income levels are unable to refuse requests from their husbands for money to drink or gamble.²⁴ Also writing from this more critical perspective, Elizabeth Eviota argues that because a Filipino man’s relationship to economic assets is typically direct, while a woman’s is typically ‘indirect

20 See, for example, Jeanne Illo, ‘Who heads the household?’; Jeanne Frances I. Illo and Jaime B. Polo, *Fishers, traders, farmers, wives: The life stories of ten women in a fishing village* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1990); Carolyn Israel-Sobritchea, ‘Gender roles and economic change in a fishing community in central Visayas’, in *Fishers of the Visayas*, ed. Iwao Ushijima and Cynthia Neri Zayas (Quezon City: College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines, 1994), pp. 279–303; Villia Jefremovas, ‘Women are good with money: The impact of cash cropping on class relations and gender ideology in northern Luzon, Philippines’, in *Women farmers and commercial ventures: Increasing food security in developing countries*, ed. Anita Spring (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000), pp. 131–50; Rosanne Rutten, *Artisans and entrepreneurs in the rural Philippines* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1993); Maria Christina Blanc Szanton, *A right to survive: Subsistence marketing in a lowland Philippine town* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972).

21 Sylvia Chant and Cathy McIlwaine, *Women of a lesser cost: Female labour, foreign exchange, and Philippine development* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1995), p. 7.

22 Illo, ‘Who heads the household?’, p. 245.

23 Li, ‘Working separately but eating together’, p. 679; Chant and McIlwaine, *Women of a lesser cost*, pp. 7–8.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 8–10.

and mediated through her husband', (married) Filipino women are more constrained in their managerial role than they might seem.²⁵

In sum and whether due to conflicting data or to different theoretical approaches or frames for reference, students of Philippine society have drawn sometimes differing conclusions regarding the role of women in household and extra-household economic matters. This is itself a matter that merits continued attention. It has helped sharpen my own focus not on gender roles but on gender relations, and on why and how these relations vary as they do.

Cooperative conflict?

An oft-noted dimension of rural Southeast Asian economic life is the extensive involvement of married women in independent income-earning activities.²⁶ In the rural Philippines today, married women have long engaged in such activities, both to 'help the household' (the most commonly cited reason, visible in such frequently heard comments as 'households today cannot get by on just one income') and so that they are less dependent on their husbands for their economic and social standing. Because households remain the basic units of production and consumption in the rural Philippines, the income-earning activities of married women must thus somehow be reconciled with those of their husbands if the household itself is to function as it should. Local understandings of this process centre, as shown above, on a culturally emphasized need for a household's co-heads to discuss and agree to a common household *plano* that effectively reconciles their separate economic activities by deciding such matters as which income will go to consumption, which will go to investment, what kind of investment will be chosen, and so on.

What is unclear is how all this actually occurs. Thus, it is certainly true that Philippine (and other) households are characterized by both production cooperation and co-management of household resources by husbands and wives, and by gendered and other differences within those households, observations of the sort that gave rise to Amartya Sen's earlier-discussed notion of 'conflictual cooperation'. While this is an apt turn of a phrase, just how conflictual is this cooperation, what forms does conflict take, and (more analytically) how do gender power relations play out in the actual negotiation of the household *plano*? According to Phyllis Moen and Elaine Worthington, 'exactly how conflicting strategies can coalesce into a "family" strategy – or even how family members with different goals achieve a consensus – is mostly uncharted territory'.²⁷ That is the territory explored here.

Research setting

The sorts of farming and fishing households discussed in this paper are ubiquitous in the rural Philippines. So too, increasingly, is occupational multiplicity within these

25 Elizabeth Eviota, 'The articulation of gender and class in the Philippines', in *Women's work*, ed. Eleanor Leacock and Helen Sala (Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 1986), p. 194.

26 Suzanne Brenner, 'Why women rule the roost: Rethinking Javanese ideologies of gender and self-control', in *Bewitching women, pious men: Gender and body politics in Southeast Asia*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Michael G. Peletz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 19–50; Jonathan Rigg, *Southeast Asia: The human landscape of modernization and development*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2003).

27 Moen and Worthington, 'Concept of family adaptive strategies', p. 239.

households, as growing numbers of rural Filipinos, either driven by economic exigency or responding to economic opportunity, have sought supplementary or alternative livelihoods. Nonetheless, the analysis in this paper does not apply equally to all rural Philippine households. It particularly concerns those rural households that enjoy at least a modicum of prosperity and live in communities where there are genuine possibilities for alternative courses of economic activity. In some rural areas, and particularly in more remote regions, poverty is widespread and economic opportunities are extremely limited. There may be no other livelihood options but fishing or farming, and even then the possibilities for economic manoeuvre may be greatly constrained. In such areas, a more traditional sexual division of labour obtains, and the notion that married women might pursue semi-independent economic lives, while perhaps appealing, fails to resonate with local circumstances. As one couple in a remote fishing community patiently explained, 'I suppose if we had big money, we could talk about different plans for what we might do with it, but for people like us, it's pretty obvious what to do next – if you have a small boat, you hope to buy a bigger boat (and so on)'. At another extreme, in those suburban communities where in many households both husbands and wives have wage employment, their discussions about economic matters are more likely to revolve around consumption decisions than production decisions. This is not to imply that in these other sorts of households men and women do not discuss or negotiate economic matters, only that they likely do so in different ways than those discussed here.

My research was conducted in two locales on the island of Palawan, a frontier region of the nation where migrant peoples from throughout the archipelago have, since the middle decades of the twentieth century, migrated in large numbers in search of land and economic opportunity. The first locale, San Jose, is a peri-urban mixed-farming community on the east coast of Palawan that has in recent decades experienced considerable non-agricultural employment diversification, largely in response to opportunities created by development in nearby Puerto Princesa City, the capital of Palawan Province. The second locale, San Vicente, is a relatively remote municipality lying on the northwest coast of the island that consists of ten coastal communities, where various combinations of fishing and farming figure in the livelihoods of most residents. While Palawan has substantial and largely hinterland populations of indigenous peoples, all of the households considered here are composed of various sorts of lowland Filipinos – i.e., peoples from Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao who are (for the most part) native speakers of either Tagalog, Cebuano or some other language of the Visayan region, or Cuyonon, a principal language of the Palawan region.²⁸

28 I typically obtained my data on household economic planning in the course of informal follow-up visits to households previously visited for other reasons and whose co-heads had appeared amenable to further questioning. I also employed local female research assistants to make inquiries of their own about these matters, particularly from women who had been helpful but guarded in my own visits. Small sample size is one significant limitation here. All in all I assembled about 20 cases documenting specific differences between household co-heads in their approach to or ideas about household economic planning (although of course I do have detailed knowledge regarding the economic circumstances and livelihood strategies of numerous other households). A second significant limitation is inconsistency in how the data were collected. Usually household heads were interviewed separately regarding their different notions of the household *plano*, but on some occasions they were interviewed together, or only one was interviewed. Some case material, furthermore, came from third parties (friends, neighbours and the like); and while I have tried to guard against it, my analysis here has likely been influenced by the second-hand nature of some of my data.

Household economic plans

As elsewhere in Southeast Asia, a considerable amount of opportunism surrounds household planning in the Philippines. Today's plan may be abandoned for another tomorrow, in the face of changing circumstances, and much of the planning is very *ad hoc* in nature. Hence plans that essentially came into being on-the-go may take on greater substance in hindsight than they ever had at the time. Local residents themselves may abet this problem, wittingly or unwittingly, as they attempt to reconstruct and make sense out of their own household economic histories. Also, just as it may not be taken for granted that all household economic behaviour reflects some sort of deliberate *a priori* strategy, neither should one too readily assume that a particular household has failed to plan. The co-heads of some newly formed households, for example, have virtually nothing with which to work, either because their parents similarly lacked assets or because those assets were squandered or lost before devolution. That 'we have a plan but no resources to set it in motion' is a sentiment often expressed by members of poorer households. Other households may have planned but subsequently suffered some misfortune: catastrophic illness, death of a co-head or divorce. Some household plans may simply not have worked or been manifest to others.

These things said, and even controlling for class position, it is indeed the case that many (but not all) households do articulate, and attempt to act on, a vision of where they would like to be several years hence and how they intend to get there. Some such plans are intended to reorient a household's basic economic strategy in a more productive direction, as when a man who previously relied upon unskilled day labour opportunities takes up vegetable gardening, or a woman who previously did not work outside the home opens a small store. Other household plans entail an intention to accumulate some investment capital or to parlay an asset already in hand into something more productive: plans, for example, to buy a tricycle for the younger, unmarried brother of one spouse to operate; to fence a distant parcel of land and fatten cattle on it; or to garden for a year and use the accumulated proceeds to put up a fish corral. All such plans are aimed at the general goal of household betterment, often phrased by parents in terms of a desire that their children 'will not have to go through what we did'. The need to save for a child's college education is one frequently encountered planning goal.

Many things, of course, can go wrong with household plans. Bad weather, bad luck, unrealistic assumptions, poor management and so forth can all lead to failure. *Suerte*, 'luck' or 'fate', and *walang suerte*, 'no luck' or 'bad luck' – local versions (here in Tagalog) of cultural notions heard throughout the Philippines – figure prominently in discussions about plans that go awry. Having plans that do not work out, however, is different from not having a plan at all, and this locally recognized (and much emphasized) distinction focused my initial research on the topic, which involved a detailed restudy of a frontier farming community I had first studied a generation earlier. I was now interested in why some of the households founded by the offspring of the community's original residents had – as they matured, married and founded households of their own – prospered economically more than others.²⁹ This general question led to the strategic importance of

29 James F. Eder, *A generation later: Household strategies and economic change in the rural Philippines* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).

household economic planning and, subsequently, to what was clearly the crucial role of women in that process. Yet while I eventually and systematically collected numerous cases of household plans, successful and otherwise, I never came to focus on how men and women, as husbands and wives, might differ in the planning process, and my understanding was left at the level of appreciating the local cultural wisdom, that in the end husbands and wives needed to agree on and implement plans together, if those plans were to be successful.

For example, one husband operated a fish corral and his wife worked at the Palawan State University cafeteria. They intended, they said, to move the fish corral from its then close-to-shore location, where it could be reached at low tide on foot or by paddling a small outrigger, to a nearby island, where fish were more abundant and the husband would face less competition from other corral operators. This move would greatly increase their fish harvest but required acquisition of a large outrigger with a diesel engine for transportation back and forth. Their current household plan was to acquire such a boat; in fact, they had already purchased an engine and were currently saving for the hull mainly from the wife's wages.

However, what I did not learn about this household (and others like it) was whether and how the two co-heads might have differed initially in what each thought was in fact the best course of action. Nor, to return to another point made earlier, did I attempt to determine whether such plans in fact arise from some sort of collective, cooperative process of household decision-making, or if they are better understood as outcomes of the differential distribution of power within households, whereby some individuals (men, adults) exert more influence than others (women, children) in the development of 'household' strategies. It was with these last questions in mind that I returned to the Philippines in 2002, 2003, and 2005 to conduct further fieldwork on the matter.

Gender and the household plano

In a household dependent entirely on fishing and whose productive capital consisted of a motorized fishing boat and a 2,000-metre drift net, the male and female co-heads were asked about what would best be next for the household, in turns of production. Both responded that an additional fishing net was needed, but upon further questioning it became apparent that they had different types of nets in mind. The male co-head wanted to purchase an additional 500 metres of drift net, thereby increasing his potential catch. The female co-head, however, wanted to purchase a beach seine, a type of net set close to shore and then hauled in by two teams of pullers, mostly women and children. This woman's own contribution to household income was as a seine puller, but as pullers receive only a small share of the total catch (the seine owner receives half the catch, while the pullers, typically about 20 in number, divide the remaining half among themselves), she reasoned that as a seine owner, she could make a more substantial contribution to household income.

In another household, the male co-head was a carpenter and furniture maker, and the female co-head made and sold snack foods to schoolchildren and passers-by. A modest amount of savings had accumulated but the co-heads differed in their plans to invest those savings. The man proposed to buy and raise pigs for sale, while the woman proposed to buy and mill unhusked rice and to re-sell the milled rice. These proposals had different time horizons (the rice buy-and-sell enterprise would turn over faster than

the hog-raising enterprise), and household co-heads do sometimes have different comfort levels regarding how long they are willing to wait before receiving a return for their efforts. However, as in the previous case, each spouse envisioned a new activity that they would have primary responsibility for. The man reasoned that since his furniture-making business is a backyard operation, he could easily look after the hogs in the course of the day. In similar fashion, the woman saw buying and selling of rice as a natural extension of her own present buy-and-sell activities.

In a household where irrigated rice farming was the principal economic activity, some investment capital had accumulated. The male co-head desired that it be used to buy a fishing boat; the female co-head desired to capitalize and operate a small store. Here the man prevailed. He argued that despite his farming background and experience, it was really the ocean that he loved, an argument to which his wife yielded. (Men often deploy such claims; see the notion of *hilig*, below). However, the woman's husband agreed to regularly give her some squid to sell, 'so she could also have an opportunity'.

Another household's livelihood depended largely on the small-scale logging activities of the male co-head. The household had recently come into a nice sum of money, which the man wanted to use to buy a chainsaw. He reasoned that since he presently borrowed a chainsaw for his logging activities and was expected to share a considerable portion of his profit with its owner, he could thereby greatly increase his contribution to household income. The man's logging activities were illegal, however (he in fact described his occupation as 'illegal logger'), and his wife feared that he might someday be apprehended for his tree-cutting activities and his chainsaw confiscated. For her part she wanted to use their money to buy a small rice field that had become available. She prevailed in her view by reasoning with her husband that the rice field would be a permanent investment, something 'good for life' – and for the life of their children.

Finally, in a household dependent entirely on the male co-head's fishing activities, the female co-head proposed to buy locally large quantities of a certain type of fish commonly dried before sale and then bring them to sell in Manila, where prices were much higher. Her husband was opposed to her plan and argued that she would never recover her expenses and that the plan was hence doomed to fail. His wife, however, insisted over his objections, and on her first trip to Manila she managed to turn a tidy profit. When she later prepared to make a second trip, the husband declared his desire to participate in the venture as well. Here the husband had no plan of his own but simply opposed his wife's plan. Cases of this sort are common, and the frequent negativity of men regarding plans put forth by women is discussed further below.

Negotiating the household plano

Turning to how a common household strategy is actually negotiated, where the co-heads of the household initially entertain different planning ideas, I lack firsthand observations of particular husband–wife discussions about planning matters and am unable to speak directly to such issues as how, for example, the differing discourse styles of men and women might figure in these discussions and their outcomes. Based on after-the-fact interviews with men and women about their own experiences in these regards and those of others with whom they are familiar, here are some of the themes that figure in these discussions, which typically centre on whether the next focus of household

effort will be a new economic activity proposed by the male co-head or one proposed by the female co-head.

At one extreme are those households where the male co-head simply imposes on the female co-head his view of how best to proceed, regardless of what her own view might be. In such local enactments of the 'father knows best' model of household decision-making, women are said to simply 'follow along' in the face of possible verbal or even physical abuse by their husbands. In these circumstances there is only one plan on the table, or at least no serious husband–wife discussion of possible alternative plans. While only a minority of rural households today fit this admittedly simplistic characterization, such households do exist. Men who insist on being the sole household voice in economic matters are often also sexually jealous of their wives and attempt to control their behaviour in other ways as well, especially with regard to any activity that might take them away from the home. The behaviour of such men is portrayed by others (both male and female) as 'old-fashioned', 'no longer appropriate', or even laughable.³⁰

The presence of sexually jealous and domineering men in the rural Philippines is today thrown into relief by the simultaneous presence of far greater numbers of men who are not consumed by jealous thoughts of absent wives and who share child care and domestic chores, for as the economic role of women has changed, so too has the domestic role of men. Nonetheless, men vary significantly in their willingness to take on domestic chores on a regular (and hence predictable) basis, and for most women their own responsibilities in this area remain an important constraint on their ability to propose and pursue income-earning activities outside the home:

When Cecilia Abad opened a small store in 1987, it was not her first choice for employment. She was employed in Puerto Princesa City prior to her marriage to Rogelio in 1984, and when their only child was two years old and could be left in the care of her mother, Cecilia hoped to contribute to household income by returning to her old job. But Rogelio prevailed upon her to open a store next to their home instead, arguing that his own mother and sister were similarly engaged in the local retail trade (and were hence potential sources of guidance), that such employment would be less physically demanding than working all day in the city, and that she could look after their son more effectively. Cecilia was not enthusiastic but went along. The store prospers today, in part because several days a week, after getting off from his own job in the livestock section of a nearby Department of Agriculture extension station, Rogelio travels to town on his motorcycle to buy goods for resale, thereby saving Cecilia the time and expense of undertaking such buying trips herself.³¹

While Rogelio supported Cecilia's desire to be productively employed outside the home, he also wanted her kept close at hand, an attitude shared by her mother, with whom they lived at the time. A friend of Cecilia's also speculated that Rogelio may have feared the loss of his wife's domestic services were she to resume fulltime work in the city, as he had been raised in a 'house full of sisters' and was hence not accustomed to doing many household chores on his own.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 115–16.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

Cecilia's experience illustrates the compromises a woman may have to make as regards her own economic ambitions as gender power relations come into play in the discussion stage of household economic plans. Again, however, men in the rural Philippines differ in these regards. Some women spoke quite specifically about the adjustments their husbands made when they embarked on new activities outside the home:

Elena Dagot spent the first few years of her marriage to Alberto at home, raising two children. But when the youngest had turned two, she was encouraged by her sisters-in-law to take up vegetable gardening to supplement the income Alberto received from his job in a government office. Because harvesting vegetables is best done in the late afternoon, when Alberto comes home today Elena is often still in her garden, and so he must prepare dinner and do other chores – unlike before, Elena says, 'when he just put his feet up'.³²

Alberto and other men in similar circumstances were sometimes quite self-conscious about their new roles; one spoke wryly of how he was now a 'houseband', a local play on the English words 'housewife' and 'husband'.

Other constraints on a woman's ability to negotiate household planning directions that might enhance her own productive contribution (and possibly take her away from home) may be even more difficult to accommodate; these include poverty, limited educational attainment and lack of opportunities afforded women by the wider political economy. That I do not discuss these constraints further here is not because they are unimportant in the rural Philippines – they are – but because I have chosen to focus on other matters. The point here is simply that even when women are able to place ideas on the household planning table, they often face constraints in arguing for those ideas that men do not, for besides reminding their wives of their domestic duties, men have other cards to play as well.

Returning to the case discussed above where a man invoked his love of the ocean to prevail in his desire to buy a fishing boat over his wife's desire to open a store, the Tagalog term *hilig* often figured in conversations I had about the direction of household planning discussions. I understand the term to mean something akin to a 'liking' or a 'calling' or even a 'passion', as when a person is said to feel drawn toward or even summoned to a particular occupation. Sometimes this is alleged to be a cultural phenomenon related to ethnic identity. Thus, about Cuyonon it is commonly said, *mahilig sila sa lupa*, 'they like (to work) the land', whereas about Visayans it is often said, *mahilig sila sa dagat*, 'they're fond of the ocean'. Yet *hilig* can be individual as well, as when a Cuyonon fisherman might say something like 'the ocean is my (particular) *hilig*', implicitly acknowledging that most Cuyonon are or are presumed to be farmers.³³

In any event, while both men and women may experience or claim such *hilig*, men more than women can invoke them successfully to nudge planning discussions in the direction of their own favoured courses of action. Indeed, the notion of *hilig* may function as a sort of male 'trump card' in such discussions, one that allows a man to argue successfully for pursuing a particular household strategy on the grounds that it would be

32 Ibid., p. 116.

33 James F. Eder, 'Of fishers and farmers: Ethnicity and resource use in coastal Palawan', *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, 31 (2003): 217.

fulfilling for him. While the matter requires further study, it appears that, culturally, men in the rural Philippines have more leeway to seek fulfilment in their economic lives, whereas women are just expected to earn money, whether they find how they earn their money fulfilling or not. (The case of Rogelio and Cecilia discussed earlier is consistent with this interpretation. Cecilia in fact specifically commented that operating a store was not her *hilig*; it was only what her circumstances allowed her to do.) The notion of *hilig* may hence be envisioned as a cultural resource that men more than women can deploy in the process of negotiating the household plan.³⁴ Why this should be so remains to be investigated, but one possibility is that women yield to their husbands on this point because they want to keep them happy, reasoning that a happy husband is more likely to work hard, and to remain faithful, than an unhappy one.

Women, however, are not without trump cards and other resources of their own. In particular, women argue – and successfully – that as wives they are entitled to have opportunities to earn incomes independently of their husbands and thereby contribute, alongside the latter, to household economic well-being. Further, they may argue, it is the responsibility of men to help ensure that their wives have those opportunities. This line of argument, of course, is a reminder of Elizabeth Eviota's important observation, discussed earlier, that many economic opportunities for married women in the Philippines are mediated through their husbands. Thus, in the cases above, Cecilia needed Rogelio's help to keep her store stocked with merchandise, and the woman who had originally wanted to open her own store was instead dependent on her fisherman husband to provide her with squid to sell.

Even where men are in principle supportive of the economic efforts of women, wives must often overcome the considerable scepticism of their husbands regarding their particular proposals to earn additional income, even when a husband may have no plan of his own. The scepticism of husbands, and even their outright opposition, regarding the economic plans of their wives was a major theme in conversations I had with women. As one expressed it, 'the man is always the negative one, and to overcome that, women must be *makulit* (insistent, persistent)'. To help overcome male opposition to their proposals, women deploy several discursive strategies. One is to emphasize the experimental nature of the plan. 'Let's just try it once and see if it works' was what several women said that they told their husbands. One of these women added that she had promised her husband that, if her plan proved unsuccessful, she would help him in his own work to make up whatever money had been lost. A second female stratagem is to invoke the well-being of the children and to explain how the proposed course of action will redound to their benefit.³⁵

The scepticism of husbands notwithstanding, the notion of a certain sort of 'female entitlement' is proving a powerful one in rural communities and it figured prominently in many conversations I had with women about household economic plans. Where does this notion – that married women should also have 'opportunities' – come from? Granted, it is born of some combination of economic necessity and opportunity,

34 See Hart, 'Gender and household dynamics', pp. 57–8.

35 Mothers throughout the region are commonly expected to be more focused on the well-being of their children than are fathers; see, for example, Brenner, 'Why women rule the roost'.

and at least in the Philippines it is indelibly associated with modernity and global discourse about women. Certainly the efforts of government agencies and NGOs to develop various new livelihood projects, many of which specifically target women for participation, have played a role; the same may be said of sundry local micro-finance programmes.

In any case, at the local level the idea that ‘women should have opportunities too’ is most usefully seen not as some sort of emergent ‘norm’ but as an actual resource than women draw upon in their course of negotiating the roles within and beyond the household with their husbands.³⁶ Seen from this perspective, households are both channels and outcomes of social processes, for as broader economic and political circumstances change, wives and other household members redefine and renegotiate their interests and new intra-household dynamics emerge. Struggles over meaning are as central to this process as struggles over labour and other material resources.³⁷

Discussion

To summarize, many rural Philippine households have self-conscious, *a priori* economic strategies that play out – sometimes as intended, sometimes not – over the life-course of the family. The readiness with which both men and women talk about their household strategies (and those of others) affords a strategic opportunity to explore still poorly understood aspects of the role of gender relations in the design and implementation of such strategies, particularly over the longer term and particularly as regards how the separate notions that husbands and wives may entertain regarding what is best for the family come to coalesce around a single household *plano*. By treating decision-making itself as a task, in the manner of Nitish Jha but here focusing on decision-making about household economic plans, we are better positioned to ask how husbands and wives ‘bargain’ about such plans, in the context of intra- and inter-household gender relations.³⁸ As Gillian Hart and others have emphasized, taking account of gender is not simply a matter of adding women, nor is it even a matter of emphasizing the *importance* of women. While the attention that Shanshan Du gives to the allegedly dual male-female leadership of Lahu households is thus welcome, for example, how this dual leadership actually works out in practice is either not problematic among the Lahu or is simply not considered; everything just seems to work out, with each spouse knowing what to do and then doing it. In contrast and like Dorte Thorsen, I see such dual male–female leadership as having significant ‘negotiating dimensions’ that need to be explored.³⁹

36 Hart, ‘Gender and household dynamics’, pp. 57–8; Henrietta Moore, ‘Households and gender relations’, in *Understanding economic process*, ed. Sutti Ortiz and Susan Lees (New York: University Press of America, 1992).

37 Hart, ‘Gender and household dynamics’, pp. 58, 61; S. S. Berry, ‘Social institutions and access to resources’, *Africa*, 59, 1 (1989): 41–55.

38 Nitish Jha, ‘Gender and decision-making in Balinese agriculture’, *American Ethnologist*, 31, 4 (2004): 552–72; Bina Agarwal, ‘“Bargaining” and gender relations: Within and beyond the household’, *Feminist Economics*, 3, 1 (1997): 1–51.

39 Hart, ‘Gender and household dynamics’, p. 41; Shanshan Du, *Chopsticks only work in pairs: Gender unity and gender equality among the Lahu of Southwest China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 135; Dorte Thorsen, ‘“We help our husbands!” Negotiating the household budget in rural Burkina Faso’, *Development and Change*, 33 (2002): 129.

The material considered here suggests the following conclusions about gender relations and household economic planning. First, and because the Philippines is sometimes said to have an ‘underworld matriarchy’ where women attempt to prevail over men by ‘manipulative, non-confrontational tactics’,⁴⁰ it should be emphasized that women and men, at least as husbands and wives, also regularly enter into quite direct and rational *discussions* with one another, regarding whatever plan one or the other has put forth. Granted, I do not have firsthand knowledge of such discussions, nor of the possibly differing discourse styles of husbands and wives, but this line of emphasis squares with local understandings that spouses should (and do) discuss such household economic plans in clear and straightforward fashion, and thereby decide rationally and jointly whether a particular plan is a good one. In short, and given that many households do decide to carry through on plans originally put forth by the female co-head, a woman in the rural Philippines often prevails in household economic planning on the strength of her ideas, and not merely on the strength of her strategies for prevailing with those ideas.

Second, the ability to plan for a household’s economic future is an important skill. In the Philippines, some say that women are better at it than men, or even that household economic planning is the responsibility of women, while others say it is simply a skill that is unequally distributed, and that whether men or women are better at it varies from household to household.⁴¹ The question remains to be answered definitively, but there are two reasons why women, on the average, may indeed develop greater household planning skills than men. One reason concerns their oft-noted role as managers of the household budget. As one woman expressed it, ‘a man comes home and gives his wife 5000 pesos each week to run the household . . . He doesn’t know whether it’s enough money or not, but it’s what he has and so that’s what he gives . . . It’s up to the woman to figure out how to make ends meet. . . .’ The weekly task of making those ends meet likely reveals possibilities for new ways of doing things in the longer term. The other reason women may develop better household planning skills concerns their considerable mobility, as they go about their economic and social lives – in particular, their frequent mobility back and forth to towns and provincial cities, it often being the woman’s role to bring produce to market, make needed purchases, bring sick children to the doctor, check up on the well-being of children living away from the home while studying at high school and college, and so on. Here too, then, as women go about their daily lives, they see new possible courses of economic action. In short, women may have more learning opportunities to develop longer-term household planning skills than do men.

Third, regardless of whether women in the Philippines are better at economic planning than men, they clearly play crucial roles in economic innovation and household income diversification, perhaps even lead roles,⁴² even when the specific new economic

40 See, for example, Chant and McIlwaine, *Women of a lesser cost*, p. 10.

41 The prominent role of women in the day to day economic affairs of Javanese households has been related by Brenner (‘Why women rule the roost’) to Javanese ideologies of gender differences in self-control, whereby women are believed more capable than men of controlling their emotions and not acting foolishly with money. While such ideologies are also present in the Philippines, they do not appear to relate in systematic fashion to the development of (partially gendered) differences in longer-term household planning skills.

42 See, for example, Chaiken, ‘Economic strategies and success’, p. 301.

activities and the resulting transformation of local landscapes are not always what they intend.⁴³ Moreover, while in many economic contexts women may admittedly play a cautious and conservative role, in other contexts they can also be major risk-takers. To conclude that women more than men may play the lead role in pushing households towards novel and potentially more productive activities is perhaps an obvious enough point for many Southeast Asian specialists,⁴⁴ but an explanation is still needed as to why. One possibility is that because most rural men in the region are traditionally and primarily either farmers or fishermen and their roles are hence fairly well specified culturally, women are better positioned to innovate or diversify, as necessities or opportunities arise. Consequently, if a woman in the rural Philippines is not free to indulge a *hilig* (at least as regards economic activities) to the degree that a man is, the upside of this for women is that they have more flexibility in responding to new opportunities. Put differently, a man may pass on an economic opportunity because it does not suit him, but a woman may seize that same opportunity because it is there.

43 Deirdre McKay, 'Cultivating new economic futures: Remittance economies and land-use patterns in Ifugao, Philippines', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 34, 2 (2003): 285–306.

44 Just as they appear to play a lead role in religious conversion and other social changes; see Eder, *A generation later*.