

# The Emerging Housebands

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The Philippines originally considered migration to be a temporary measure to ease economic problems; it is expected that when the Philippines is promoted from developing status that the number of migrants will fall; until then, migration remains entrenched in the Philippines.<sup>2</sup> The Philippines recognizes the importance of overseas Filipino workers to Philippine economy; Filipino “migrants [are] a vital source of the external finance necessary for servicing debt and importing oil.”<sup>3</sup>

Poverty and the country’s foreign debts led to large-scale unemployment and an overabundant labor supply, forcing some to resort to working abroad, which government programs encouraged.<sup>4</sup> Given the number of Philippine migrants and their remittances, many administrative departments concerned with overseas workers formed to “strengthen ties with Filipinos overseas and promote their interests in the Philippines and abroad.”<sup>5</sup> An average of 2,500 Filipinos leave the country every day for work abroad. Nearly ten percent or 8 million Filipino

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<sup>2</sup> M. M. Asis, (*Minding the Gaps: Migration and Development in the Philippines*. (Scalabrini Migration Center, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> J. Bach & S. Solomon, *Labors of Globalization: Emergent State Responses* (Working paper № 13). (International Affairs at The New School, 2006}.

<sup>4</sup> P. Gresham, *Heroes at home? Disputing Popular Images of Nonmigrating Husbands of Overseas Filipina Workers*, 2011. Retrieved on October 2012 from <http://phillipgresham.com/docs/heroes-at-home.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Official Website of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas. Retrieved 28 May, 2011 from <http://cfo.gov.ph/>

people are overseas workers working in 182 countries.<sup>6</sup> Remittances are an important part of survival strategy for households who are affected by the organization of migratory and remittance processes.<sup>7</sup>

Migrating women and even non-migrating women feel a sense of empowerment from the separation of sex roles or from assumption of the role of breadwinner. Migration and remittances contribute to changing gender roles and dynamics.<sup>8</sup> Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) shows that there are changes in the sex composition of overseas land-based deployment. In 1992, 50.7% of the new hires were women. But by the year 2000, this percentage increased to 69.1 %.<sup>9</sup> There is a growing feminization of the country's workforce that has created a shift in the roles of the husband and wife. The married women who are usually left at home to take care of their children and do household chores are going abroad to work. As a result, their husbands, otherwise known as *housebands*, are left at home to assume the reproductive roles the women left behind.<sup>10</sup>

With the feminization of the OFWs come these questions: Has the female migration affected the men left behind? Are *housebands* effective in their reproductive role? Using Key Informant Interviews (KII), the researchers discovered practical answers to these questions.

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<sup>6</sup> Y. Collymore, *Population Reference Bureau*. Retrieved on September 8, 2012 from <http://www.prb.org/Articles/2003/RapidPopulationGrowthCrowdedCitiesPresentChallengesinthePhilippines.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> Gresham, *Op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> H. B. Morada, *Left-behind household of overseas Filipino workers*. Retrieved on October 2012 from <http://www.filipiniana.net/publication/left-behind-household-of-overseas-filipino-workers/> 1319 5330094439

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

## Discussion

Articles 110<sup>11</sup>, 111<sup>12</sup>, 115<sup>13</sup>, 117<sup>14</sup>, and 165<sup>15</sup> of the Civil Code of the Philippines clearly delineate the roles of spouses in their communal living from the choice of residence, support, management of the household, exercise of profession or business or work, to administrator of the conjugal property. The husband performs the productive role in this setting; he has more control and more power in decision-making under these provisions in the Civil Code; the wife plays the reproductive role of home management. With the advent of the Family Code, however, these roles underwent a metamorphosis. The modification of these roles

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<sup>11</sup> Article 110. The husband shall fix the residence of the family. But the court may exempt the wife from living with the husband if he should live abroad unless in the service of the Republic.

<sup>12</sup> Article 111. The husband is responsible for the support of the wife and the rest of the family. These expenses shall be met first from the conjugal property, then from the husband's capital, and lastly from the wife's paraphernal property. In case there is a separation of property, by stipulation in the marriage settlements, the husband and wife shall contribute proportionately to the family expenses.

<sup>13</sup> Article 115. The wife manages the affairs of the household. She may purchase things necessary for the support of the family, and the conjugal partnership shall be bound thereby. She may borrow money for this purpose, if the husband fails to deliver the proper sum. The purchase of jewelry and precious objects is voidable, unless the transaction has been expressly or tacitly approved by the husband, or unless the price paid is from her paraphernal property.

<sup>14</sup> Article 117. The wife may exercise any profession or occupation or engage in business. However, the husband may object, provided: (1) His income is sufficient for the family, according to its social standing, and (2) His opposition is founded on serious and valid grounds. In case of disagreement on this question, the parents and grandparents as well as the family council, if any, shall be consulted. If no agreement is still arrived at, the court will decide whatever may be proper and in the best interest of the family.

<sup>15</sup> Article 165. The husband is the administrator of the conjugal partnership.

is encoded in Articles 60<sup>16</sup>, 70<sup>17</sup>, 71<sup>18</sup>, 73<sup>19</sup>, and 124<sup>20</sup> of the Family Code. Here, the male spouse is given a role in the management of the household that shows he is as capable as his wife in this area. Hence, when the wife leaves the home to join the bandwagon and work abroad, he takes over. A *houseband* performs the reproductive role of his wife without leaving his productive role, too; he contributes to the family coffers from his involvement in agricultural operations like a piggery or a small farm. He earns by selling food in the street; he works double-shifts to sustain the needs of his family.<sup>21</sup>

Men compare themselves to the gender norms of Philippine culture, which see them as the providers of the household. Following the patriarchal system dominated by the *macho* male image, they believe that if a spouse needs to migrate and work in a foreign land, it is the man who should go. When the wife migrates because she has skills more desirable for work in foreign lands, he feels emasculated in the community; he feels his manhood is belittled because he is not being seen as the main provider of the family.

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<sup>16</sup> Article 60. The husband and wife shall fix the family domicile. In case of disagreement, the court shall decide. The court may exempt one spouse from living with the other if the latter should live abroad or there are other valid and compelling reasons for the exemption. However, such exemption shall not apply if the same is not compatible with the solidarity of the family.

<sup>17</sup> Article 70. The spouses are jointly responsible for the support of the family. The expenses for such support and other conjugal obligations shall be paid from the community property and, in the absence thereof, from the income or fruits of their separate properties. In case of insufficiency or absence of said income or fruits, such obligations shall be satisfied from the separate properties.

<sup>18</sup> Article 71. The management of the household shall be the right and duty of both spouses. The expenses for such management shall be paid in accordance with the provisions of Art. 70.

<sup>19</sup> Article 73. Either spouse may exercise any legitimate profession, occupation, business or activity without the consent of the other. The latter may object only on valid, serious, and moral grounds. In case of disagreement, the court shall decide whether or not (1) The objection is proper; and (2) Benefit has occurred to the family prior to the objection or thereafter. If the benefit accrued prior to the objection, the resulting obligation shall be enforced against the separate property of the spouse who has not obtained consent.

<sup>20</sup> Article 124. The administration and the enjoyment of the conjugal partnership property shall belong to both spouses jointly. In case of disagreement, the husband's decision shall prevail, subject to recourse to the court by the wife for a proper remedy, which must be availed of within five years from the date of the contract implementing such decision.

<sup>21</sup> A. Pingol, *Remaking Masculinities: Identity, Power, and Gender Dynamics in Families with Migrant Wives and Househusbands*. (University of the Philippines, Center for Women's Studies, 2001).

The key informants of the study come from two strata: the first stratum are the *housebands* who continued to pursue their careers and willingly carried the dual roles entrusted to them. They explain that when their wives went abroad to work, they went out of their way to hire a *kasambahay* to cover the duties of their absent spouses. Despite this move, however, they find themselves carrying the responsibility of managing the house and the rearing of the children. When major decisions are required, however, they consult their wives to come up with the best solution that benefits the family.

The second stratum consists of key informants who are financially challenged and rely on their spouses' earnings to make a decent home life in the Philippines. These *housebands* feel the most drastic change. They do not have any occupation; hence, they do not have the means to hire a *kasambahay* so they had to do all the duties of their absent spouse. At first, these *housebands* find the reproductive role quite difficult but eventually, they learn to perform all the household chores, just like any learned skill. Like the *housebands* of the first stratum, they carry the bigger portion of decision-making for the house and family.

In terms of child rearing, both *houseband* strata are as good as their wives. They wake up early in the morning to cook food and feed their children, take them to school, help them in their homework, and tuck them to bed.<sup>22</sup> Since it is their wives who send money from abroad for their needs and wants, the *housebands* handle the money and allocate funds for the usual needs of the family. However, when it comes to more important decisions about certain financial transactions that require a joint decision, the *housebands* consult their wives for joint agreement on the matter.

There are variations to the *houseband's* reproductive role most often seen in the *housebands* of the first stratum. Since they cannot do both productive and reproductive roles, they hire a *kasambahay* or invite a female relative or older relatives from either spouse's extended family to baby-sit the children, cook for them, do the marketing, clean the house, do

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

the laundry, take them to school, and fetch them from school. In this case, there is no physical switch of roles between the *houseband* and the wife. But all other nurturing tasks of the migrant spouse, such as being there for the children, the *housebands* provide.

Other than the assumption of the reproductive roles, housebands often find themselves alone. The migrant wives may also feel a similar aloneness. This leads to incidents of marital infidelity on either spouse. The absence of a spouse often leads to loneliness, aloneness, and depression that may push either spouse to seek solace in the arms of another. In *Republic v. Iyoy*<sup>23</sup> the wife left her husband and five children to work abroad, then divorced her husband, married an American, and had children with him. In *Zamora v. Court of Appeals*<sup>24</sup>, the wife, a nurse, left to work in the United States of America; with her gone, the husband left their home, cohabited with another woman, and had children with her.

The worst that happens in the absence of the wife is the occurrence of incest. In *People v. Pangilinan*<sup>25</sup>, where the *houseband* was left with his minor children, he forced himself on his ten-year female child. The Court points, "In this society, at a time when incestuous acts are not uncommon, and with the situation where the accused and offended party were in, when the wife of the accused was away working in Singapore, it is easy to believe that his loneliness urged him to sexually abuse his daughter."

## Conclusion

Although of varying degree, there are changes in the family when the wife leaves to work in a foreign land and the husband is left at home to care for children. Some of these changes are mild; others are drastic depending on the current financial status of the family. Those who are better off from the beginning experience fewer changes than those who have less in life. But with more Filipino wives leaving for work

abroad, there is a rising number of *housebands* left behind in their wake that may experience changes not so blatantly seen and recorded. These *housebands* have taken not only the roles of their wives but also find their needs unanswered and their *macho* image questioned.

It seems that *housebands* receive little attention and care from a society who focused more on the needs and sufferings of their migrant wives. But they persevered and earned their own niche in the household. In the long run, they believe they can be nurturers, too. Sans the *macho* image hindering them to take their new role, they can be the mothers their children need at home. More research along this line will help empower *housebands* accept their new nurturing role in society.

<sup>23</sup> G. R. No. 152577 (2005).

<sup>24</sup> G.R. No. 141917 (2007).

<sup>25</sup> G. R. No. 171020 (2007).