Through the prism of seamen's left-behind wives: Imagination and the culture of migration in Ilocos, Philippines

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Abstract

Discussions of a culture of migration in the Philippines present it to mean a predisposition to migrate and focus on the migrants. Through the prism of the experiences of seamen's wives in an Ilocos town, experiences narrated through interviews, this article aims to cut a conceptual space in which to examine the relationship between left-behind women and the culture of migration. Examining the women's persistent references to settlement migration to Hawaii against which their husband's labor migration as seafarers is compared, this article provides a discussion of a culture of migration among Ilocanos that has been vitally shaped by the socio-economic possibilities brought about by Ilocano migration to Hawaii beginning in the early 20th century. Consequently, it offers historical and cultural specificity to scholarly discussions of the Philippines' culture of migration, which remains pitched at the national level.

Keywords

left-behind women, culture of migration, imagination, seamen's wives, Ilocos Norte, Hawaii

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Introduction

That left-behind wives sustain male emigration through the responsibilities and tasks they do in the absence of their husband is by now an established fact in migration scholarship (Brettell, 1986; Glystos, 2008; Kanaiaupuni, 2000). As Kanaiaupuni (2000: 2) says of Mexican migration to the USA:

> . . . women and their labors in origin villages are crucial to the migration process—*they make men's migration possible and ensure its continuity across space and time*. As such, they form the invisible backbone of this transnational migration process that has endured for over a century [emphasis in original].

Drawing on the experiences of women married to Ilocano seafarers, this article revisits the role left-behind wives play in migration by looking at the "imaginative" component of their implication and involvement in migration projects.[1] In doing so, it links the women to the concept of "culture of migration." Discussions of a culture of migration in the Philippines have looked at the confluence of factors that have contributed to its development, resulting in an analysis that is pitched at the national level and in an understanding of the concept as mainly meaning "a predisposition to migrate," hence putting the focus on the migrants. Through the prism of the experiences of seamen's wives in an Ilocos town, this article aims to cut a conceptual space in which to examine the relationship between left-behind women and a culture of migration. Examining the women's persistent references to settlement migration to Hawaii, against which their husband's labor migration as seafarers is compared, this article provides a discussion of a culture of migration among Ilocanos that has been vitally shaped by Ilocano migration to Hawaii beginning in the early 20th century.

Data and methods

This article draws from my study of the spatiotemporality of the subjectification—the process of becoming historical actors—of Filipino seamen's wives (Galam, 2011). The insights, particularly the women's persistent references to migration to Hawaii, come from data generated by interview questions that did not set out to inquire into the position of contract labor migration (to which their husband's seafaring belongs) in relation to other forms such as migration through family reunification. The references to Hawaii emerged unbidden by me, the researcher, and suggest the force

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[1]Although there are negative connotations to the term "left behind" (Archambault, 2010), it is the term I use because it approximates most *nabati*, the Ilocano word that research participants used to refer to themselves.

exercised by the socio-economic possibilities that many immigrants to Hawaii have enjoyed on the migration imagination of residents of San Gabriel (a pseudonym), the town in Ilocos Norte where I did the fieldwork. Although they first appeared tangential to my research questions, they later on became crucial in understanding how the women positioned themselves within migration projects and in finding a way of linking them to such projects. Using these insights from left-behind seamen's wives provides a way to clarify both our understanding of "culture of migration" and their place in it.

Interview data are derived from fieldwork I undertook from February to September 2010, during which I conducted 40 semi-structured interviews. An additional 10 interviews were conducted between December 2011 and January 2012. Participants were selected through purposive sampling using the following parameters (based on different circumstances, points in the lifecycle of the seaman-husband and wife, and points in the seafaring career of husbands): wives in full-time employment; wives not in employment; wives with dependent children; wives with adult children; wives with no children; wives who live with their in-laws; wives whose husbands have risen to the rank of chief engineer or captain; wives whose husbands have retired; and wives whose husbands have stopped working because of illness. These parameters were taken to vitally shape and structure the women's lives and how they experienced their husband's migration. In this article, these parameters were thought to inform the investments of these wives into their husband's migration, as well as their perceptions and experiences of the benefits and hardships engendered by their husband's alternating absence and presence. The first round of interviews conducted in 2010 did not include women married to retired seafarers. The interviews conducted between December 2011 and January 2012 specifically sought women whose husbands have stopped going to sea. Their experiences were thought to provide insights into how life can be different without an income provided by migrant work. Between October 2013 and June 2014, I re-interviewed 10 of the 40 interviewees from my 2010 fieldwork. Participants whose experiences are used to illustrate and develop arguments have been given pseudonyms. Where their statements are quoted, only the English translation is provided, except when particular phrases or words denote cultural concepts, in which case the relevant statement is also given in Ilocano in order to provide the analysis with the proper linguistic and cultural context.

All interviews were conducted in Ilocano except for three, which were done in Filipino. Many interviewees, however, mixed Ilocano, Filipino and English languages. All interviews were transcribed and recurrent themes identified, upon which an indexing and coding frame was prepared.

This article elaborates on the theme "perceptions of migration," in the process offering an argument for how left-behind wives may be linked more explicitly with the culture of migration. Clarifying the link between left-behind women and the culture of migration helps delineate how they are agents of migration.

Left-behind wives and the culture of migration

Scholars of Philippine migration have pointed to a by-now pervasive Filipino culture of migration (Asis, 1995, 2006, 2008; Baggio, 2008; Hilsdon, 1997; Sills and Chowthi, 2008). Asis (2006) traces its emergence to the confluence of historical, political, social, and economic factors at various scales—national, regional and global. She argues that the development of a Philippine culture of migration has been greatly facilitated by the Philippine state's institutionalization of migration (Asis, 2006). Its reliance on the remittances of overseas Filipino workers to help keep the Philippine economy afloat has provided the impetus for the state to become actively involved in promoting, facilitating, organizing, and managing the continued deployment of Filipinos for work abroad. Similarly, Sills and Chowthi (2008) attribute the development of "a culture of labor migration in the Philippines" to the country's history of emigration, the state's promotion of overseas labor, and its reliance on remittances to prop up the economy (see also Sills, 2007). Asis (2008: 79) observes that "over the years, the idea of working abroad spread from a few pockets of the country in the 1970s to the whole archipelago." So pervasive has migration become in the Philippines that commentators now speak of it as "a social fact" (Aguilar, 2009a), "a fact of life" (Asis, 2008), "a way of life" (Sills and Chowthi, 2008), and "routine and taken-for-granted" (Asis, 1995). Aside from those already mentioned, the banality, that is, routineness, of migration in the Philippines may also be attributed to how recruitment agencies and educational institutions have both capitalized on, and reinforced, the migration aspirations of Filipinos (Asis, 2006, 2008).

At its core, "culture of migration" refers to the "establishment of norms within a community" that sustains migration (Massey et al., 1998: 192; see also Alarcon, 1987). It is considered a process belonging to the cumulative causation theory of migration, which "refers to the tendency for international migration to perpetuate itself over time, regardless of the conditions that originally caused it" (Massey et al., 1998: 192). In their most explicit effort to explain the development of "culture of migration," Massey et al. (1998), drawing mainly on Mexican-Hispanic literature, write of its distinct features. First, successful migrants provide a powerful

demonstration effect of the financial and material benefits of international migration. Others in their community admire and are drawn to emulate their new lifestyle and aspire to have access to the same ability to consume goods and acquire property. Second, while the attractiveness of migration is partly and initially due to financial and material gains, migration becomes a social norm in which overseas work becomes integrated into the community's structure of values and expectations. Third, as migration becomes more widespread and important in the community, with more and more members undertaking and relying on it, it comes to acquire the status of a rite of passage by which men prove themselves and against which others are measured. Finally, with their participation in migration, women become more powerful and influential in their family through their financial contribution. Their stay abroad exposes them to more egalitarian gender relations, and they push for greater equality as well as working towards settling abroad (Massey et al., 1998: 105).

Kandell and Massey (2002), in their essay that "provides the first quantitative evidence for the culture of migration argument," (1002) describe the social mechanisms involved in the transmission of a culture of migration within a community:

> The more a community's families become involved in migration, the higher the likelihood that children will aspire to work in the US, which causes them to look northward rather than locally for opportunities and social mobility. As a consequence, they reduce their investment in the acquisition of resources (education), and increase their investment in the prospect of migration, substantially raising the odds that they actually will migrate as they get older and, through their involvement in international migration, ultimately pass pro-migration values on to their own children (Kandell and Massey, 2002: 1002).

As in the Mexican case described by Kandell and Massey (2002), in the Philippines, the social institutionalization of migration is also seen to occur through the family, with the difference that Filipino families invest in education to improve members' chances of migration. Asis (2000) writes that where there is continued reliance on migration to provide for the needs of families, "migration values develop and are nurtured in families" (264). International labor migration becomes a, if not the, major component of a family's livelihood strategy (Asis, 2008). Although she points to the centrality of the family, Asis (2008) seems to have the migrating member/s at the fore of her argument when she writes, "Once a family member starts to migrate, other members tend to tread the same pattern" (Asis, 2008: 86). What remains to be explicated is the link between

the left-behind and the culture of migration. How might their part in the perpetuation and legitimization of a culture of migration be accounted for within how the concept "culture of migration" has been defined?

In order to answer this question, we need to disaggregate "culture of migration." Three useful categories for understanding the concept are offered in the literature. One, it "refers to the way that migration becomes a cultural fact in the communities of origin" (Horvath, 2008: 773). Two, it "relates to the system of norms and ideologies that create a framework of interpretation and evaluation for the stability or mobility in a given society" (Horvath, 2008: 774). Three, it "refers to adjustments in the behavior and changes in the relationships between all local residents in the absence of the people with certain functions on different levels of the community..." (Elrick, 2008: 1505).

It is vitally important to pose the question of what role left-behind wives play in the development and spread of a culture of migration because, in its most empirically grounded conceptualization, that offered by Massey et al. (1998), "culture of migration" does not explicitly address the place of non-migrants, let alone left-behind women. Nevertheless, Massey et al. (1998) explain that over time and with the extensive back and forth movement of migrants, there develops a "culture of migration" distinct from the culture of both the sending and receiving societies, changing the context within which migration decisions are made (105). It thus represents a "third culture" (Elrick, 2008). We might thus look at "culture of migration" in terms of category 1 above, that is, a culture of migration grows out of, and develops from, the fusion of the foreign and local cultures (Elrick, 2008). This "third culture," i.e., culture of migration, embodies the mixing of newly adapted values and existing local ones (Elrick, 2008). It "concerns the emergence of new artifacts, habits, perspectives, ideas and values that become a part of the sending society's culture" (Horvath, 2008: 773). Category 2 refers to migration acquiring a socially normative status, that is, it comes to be seen as akin to a rite of passage (Massey et al., 1998) bestowing upon those who undertake the journey a status that is socially valued and against which other members are measured. Category 3 refers to the social and cultural adaptations that societies make in the departure and absence of members (Aguilar, 2009a; Galam, 2012; Horvath, 2008; White, 2010).

Looking at culture of migration not only in the sense of a "predilection to migrate" but also in terms of a dynamic that gives rise to a culture obtaining from experiences of migration (category 1) opens up a conceptual space for the incorporation of left-behind wives and their contribution to the perpetuation of this "third culture." Equally important, by looking at culture of migration as encompassing the ways the migrant source societies adapt in order to continue existing, thereby demonstrating resilience and flexibility (category 3), we are able to more clearly locate the

contribution of left-behind women to the maintenance of these societies. Not only do left-behind wives help prevent migrant source communities from disintegrating; they also make migration economically viable and provide it with social legitimacy (Oishi, 2005).

The link between left-behind wives and culture of migration (understood in terms of category 1 above) might be established in the way they share in the imagination of migration as social navigation. They become agents in the diffusion of a culture of migration through their integration into their own mentality and horizon of the economic and social possibilities offered by migration. The following section explores how left-behind seamen's wives share in the social and collective cognition of migration as the key to a better life, a sharing that is tightly woven with what their lives used to be and the changes that labor migration has brought about.

Migration, imagination, social navigation

The desire to improve one's socio-economic situation remains the most significant reason for overseas Filipino labor migration (Asis and Battistella, 2013). Rita, 35 years old, mother of two children and whose husband has been seafaring for 10 years as an oiler puts it simply but powerfully: "so we would have food that has a bit more flavor." She does not reduce migration to the provision of a family's most basic needs, albeit this is an important component of it. Rather, her answer to my question of why she is willing to endure the long absences of her husband evokes the desire for a more comfortable life, one that goes beyond the alimentary. She also points to her place in this migration. She endures the difficulties and challenges obtaining in her husband's absence so that she and her family would not have to endure the difficulties and challenges of a hard life. That is, subsisting on low income from local jobs (if there are any), income that will not enable them to afford "food that has more flavor," let alone secure their future. This future, characterized by improved socio-economic possibilities, is what Nora, 51 years old, mother of five children and whose husband has been seafaring for 26 years (as a 2nd engineer in the last two years) refers to when she said, "I have to sacrifice so that we can have a better life." In Ilocano, the language in which she originally said it (*Agsakripisyo tapno makalung-aw met iti panagbiag*), she uses the word *lung-aw*, which refers to keeping one's head above water so that one can breathe and not drown. This reveals how she sees migration as swimming for survival. She imagines migration as a way of navigating the uncertain waters of life in the Philippines, as a way of responding to risks or threats of social and economic crisis and death. Such a conception might be argued to rely upon the work of imagination.

Migration as social navigation

Extending Nora's insight, we might look at migration as social navigation (Vigh, 2006, 2009). In the context of youth soldiering and migration within which he writes, Vigh (2006, 2009) has called "navigation" the way one moves within a social environment and how one is moved by that same environment. He explains further that navigation is "simultaneously keep[ing] oneself free of immediate social dangers and direct[ing] one's life through an uncertain social environment, towards better possible futures and improved life chances" (Vigh, 2009: 97). Vigh's concept of navigation involves negotiating the temporal and spatial dimensions of a social environment. It is geared towards overcoming a present characterized by social and economic limitations.

Migration, following Vigh (2009: 94), might be seen as "a technology of the imagination. . . an act through which people come to imagine better lives in other times or places." For seamen's wives, it is a way of bridging the gap between what is socially desired and what in the Philippines is economically possible, which the wives have pronounced as limited, if not unavailable, for improving their social possibilities. In order to live, and to live a better life, one must leave. Futures are imagined at home (a "home" or locality that has, however, been linked to an outside economy) but are realized, or at least actively worked for, elsewhere (see Vigh, 2009: 103). To the extent that migration is seen as a way of negotiating social, economic and temporal (future) uncertainties, and of obtaining a better life, imagination is a crucial component that underpins not only migration but also the development of a culture of migration.

Seamen's wives and the wages of migration

Seamen's wives consider their husband's undertaking of contract labor migration as a lifeline. The reality or threat of nothingness, of life becoming impossible or not viable, looms large to them. They say that if their husbands did not leave, their families "would not have a life" (*awan met biagmi, ana ngarud biagmi no di mapan*), "face a life of pure hardship" (*puro rigat met ti biag, rigat met latta ti adda*) or a "life that revolves around debt" (*utang met laeng ti pagpuligosan*). Wives themselves see migration as offering the possibility of escaping this condition. It makes it possible for them to even think of a future. The women's desire for a better life entails sacrifice. They exchange one form of hardship with another, but one which offers a promise of a better life. Irene, 33 years old, mother of two children, and whose husband has been seafaring for 10 years, described the affinity between their life and hardship as *rigat met laeng ti adda* ("there is nothing

but hardship/hardship is all that there is"). Because of it, they are willing to endure, indeed will themselves to endure. They see it as part of their life because if their husbands did not leave, they would not have a life or anything to live on. All of the women describe their lives of being on their own as hard and as entailing longsuffering and sacrifice. It demands fortitude and steeling one's body and inner self. Emilia (45 years old, married to a bosun seafaring for 15 years, and mother of four children) described her life as akin to bearing a cross (*kasla agibaklay ti krus*). As suggested by Emilia, left-behind wives might be seen as undertaking a journey, a journey through which they carry a burden, one that hopefully will bring about economic and social upliftment, if not redemption.

In order for the whole family to have a life and a future, it has to be broken, torn apart, albeit temporarily. As Rosa, 21 years old, mother of two children (two years old and two months old) and whose husband has been seafaring for 10 years, said, "*awan mabalin a ta no agtiptipkel kami, awan met biagmi*" ("we have no choice because if we stayed together, we would have no life"). This breaking apart might be seen as an effort to link together space and time, that is, the seeking of life in another place is an attempt to secure and guarantee the present and future life of a family. The domestic territory of the Philippine nation-state is crossed for the sake of another domestic institution, the family. What wives do to sustain their families in the absence of their husbands must be seen as a contribution to the securing and guaranteeing of the family's present and future. In addition, it may be argued that the Philippines is also a domestic entity, the survival of which (and future, too) is partly the labor of Filipino seamen's wives. This is precisely because the remittances are sent back home, and through the banking system, a move the Marcos government made to ensure that remittances pass through the state (Rodriguez, 2010), thus temporarily guaranteeing the Philippines' present. Seafarers have had no choice since their salaries are paid by manning agencies located right in the Philippines. It is in the shipping industry, as Aguilar (2003) has noted, that the Philippine state has exercised most its extractive reach.

In San Gabriel, local government personnel certainly do not earn much.[2] A seafarer's income easily dwarfs what local workers make. According to the salary rates set by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) for 2012–2014 (ITF, 2014), the lowest-paid ship crew, deck boy and catering boy, would earn a monthly salary of

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[2]According to the "Monthly salary schedule for local government personnel in fifth class provinces and cities and third class municipalities" (effective 1 January 2010) provided to this author by the Office of the Treasurer of San Gabriel, an employee at salary grade 1 (the lowest) earns roughly PHP5,500 to PHP6,300 a month (around USD120 to USD140 at an exchange rate of PHP45 to a dollar), while someone at salary grade 30 (the highest) earns about PHP37,000 to PHP42,000 (around USD820 to USD935).

USD1,132[3] or about PHP51,000, which significantly exceeds that of the mayor, the highest-paid employee of San Gabriel. Many of the wives mention visible signs of improvement such as being able to buy more electrical appliances; afford private schooling for their children; and pay for piano, ballet or voice lessons. Many have been able to purchase status-symbol objects such as cars and sports utility vehicles (SUVs), sometimes owning two or three. But without a doubt the most important of all, they have been able to build a house. Indeed, in a number of instances, when people gave me directions to find the house of seamen's wives I was going to interview, I was simply told to look for the big house, which, I was assured, I would not miss. This was especially true when I was interviewing in villages outside of the *poblacion*, the town's urban area. Such visual descriptions index the economic and social status these seamen and their families have achieved.

Many of those who have enjoyed the most significant material improvement are those married to senior officers, clearly because they are paid a lot more. Amelia, 55 years old, mother of three children, and married to a captain (in the last five years but who has been seafaring for 25 years) owns four cars (one each for her and her three adult children). Nevertheless, there were some women whose situation rank, on its own, is not able to account for. The husband of Aida (41 years old, mother of two children) is an oiler while the husband of Josefa (51 years old and mother of one child) was a fourth engineer. Their family's economic standing was due in large measure to these two women's success with their business ventures. Josefa's natal family also owned tracts of land which were planted to rice and other crops and therefore saved them considerable amounts of money which would have been spent on rice, the staple food. Several other families who were doing well already had some migration-enabled resources to begin with: many of them had parents who were themselves migrants, particularly to the United States of America (USA). Two other officers' wives were professionals (accountant and head teacher). In contrast, Lourdes—who was never in paid employment and whose husband has only been seafaring since 2002—and her family owned three SUVs. Their house was also under construction. Lourdes' parents and all of her siblings were in Hawaii and three of Lourdes' sons, all in their twenties, were themselves seafarers. The combination of these circumstances has led to Lourdes' family's ability to enjoy a very comfortable life.

Wives, including those whose husbands have only been on a few voyages, note the life-changing benefits of separation due to migration. In the

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[3]The Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) has its own rates, but salaries are determined by the companies or employers.

words of one interviewee, *nakakaluwag*: with more money, they feel less constrained, more able to breathe. This description is apropos because the financial and material gains of separation-through-migration provide families with more spending power and the social space in which their family is positioned expands. With many constraints removed by this improvement (no longer will they have to worry where to get the next meal or where to get money when a family member gets ill), wives feel also some physical, embodied effect—they can breathe more easily. Life begins to become easier, more comfortable.

Women whose husbands have decided to retire due to age or for health reasons note a big difference in their life now from that when they could still rely on the salary of their seafaring husbands. But all of them expressed thankfulness for what seafaring has given them. They have built their houses, they have sent their children to college or university, and enjoyed years of what the women modestly described as enjoying some degree of comfort in life. Although their lives are obviously no longer as comfortable, and although they note this financial diminishment, they also expressed a sense of accomplishment (their house, the education of their children, the much better life they were able to provide for their children), an accomplishment that clearly gives them a sense of satisfaction, fulfillment and pride.

A number of the women have children who have gone on to become overseas contract workers themselves. They could therefore rely on financial assistance from them. Amanda, 48 years old, with four children, and whose husband, a wiper for 10 years but who could no longer get a job as a seafarer due to illness and who is now a tricycle driver, could rely on financial support from her son who himself is now a seafarer. Genoveva, 58 years old, with three children, and whose husband now farms, earns some money by selling cosmetic products and by serving as a *barangay kagawad* (village council member), for which she gets an annual honorarium of PHP12,000 paid quarterly. Her eldest son, an engineer working in Abu Dhabi, also sends her money monthly.

Other seafarer families are investing in the labor migration of family members in order to obtain some economic and financial security. For example, Grace—35 years old, with two children, and whose husband has been seafaring since 2006 but who is increasingly facing the possibility of his seafaring being prematurely ended by illness—had an agreement with her husband that when he stopped working, it will be her turn to work overseas. Her husband has a number of siblings working in Italy and whose move there was financed by her husband. Dolores, 52 years old, and her husband who has been seafaring for 19 years (as bosun for the last eight years), fully supported the migration aspirations of their daughter

(one of their three children) and financed her training and application for a caregiver job in Canada, for which Dolores said they had spent half a million pesos. This money, according to Dolores, had earlier been earmarked as her husband's retirement savings. They were prepared to gamble this money for their daughter's migration to a country that, if she was lucky enough, would let her bring them, her parents, there in due time. In my follow-up interview with Dolores in March 2014, she shared that her daughter withdrew her application to Canada as it had seemed hopeless, a wise but costly decision in that she was not able to recover all the money she had paid to the recruitment agency. She instead went to Hong Kong where, while employed as a domestic helper, she pursued her goal of going to Canada. She eventually moved there in 2013, after two years in Hong Kong. When I asked Dolores why her daughter specifically targeted Canada, she said, "it's where she can go, we can't go to Hawaii." Dolores not only referred to the fact that it is Canada where her daughter has job opportunities but also how migration projects are haunted by Hawaii. The following section explores why Hawaii looms large in the migration imagination and discourse in San Gabriel and in the Ilocos region.

Hawaii in the imagination of seamen's wives

Of the 2.8 million Filipino immigrants and their children (first and second generations) living in the USA, around 814,000 Filipino immigrants reside in California and about 110,000 in Hawaii (MPI, 2014). Figures from a village-by-village list of migrants from San Gabriel conducted in 2009 by the municipality's Office of Planning and Development show that 4,090 are living or working abroad. This overseas population comprises 13 percent of the town's population (Municipality of San Gabriel, 2009a). Of this number, nearly 73 percent are in the USA: about 58 percent in Hawaii and around 15 percent on the US mainland, mostly California (Municipality of San Gabriel, 2009b).[4] Just over 800 are listed as living or working outside of the USA with the following countries as top destinations: Italy (163); Hong Kong (130); Saudi Arabia (83); Singapore (74); Spain (58); Taiwan (48); United Arab Emirates (48); Canada (35); Norway (28); Greece (23); South Korea (20); Kuwait (15); Qatar (9); Malaysia (6); UK (6); and Japan (5). Only Italy, Spain, Canada, Norway and the UK offer the possibility for settlement migration. The other destination countries allow migrant

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[4]The survey, called "Sons and Daughters of San Gabriel by Barangay" (2009b) was a simple enumeration of overseas migrants and where they migrated to. Although the listing was conducted village by village, it is not complete. I thank San Gabriel's Office of Development and Planning for giving me a copy of the list, which at that time had yet to be collated.

workers to stay on a contract basis. Perhaps because they do not reside in a host country, only a few seafarers were included in the list. However, based on my fieldwork, I estimate the number of seafarers from San Gabriel to be around 150.[5]

The significance of migration to Hawaii and mainland US (specifically California) from San Gabriel is not only numerical; as a result of the predominance of movement from the town to these two US states, the appearance of the town has been transformed by the construction of big houses since the 1970s. People from other towns, particularly those that are not sources of emigration to Hawaii, would frequently remark, in quick succession, that San Gabriel's residents are *babaknang*, or rich, that it has many big and beautiful houses and many Hawaiianos. That wealth, a big house, and Hawaii are closely linked in San Gabriel is not lost on seamen's wives. In my interview with Dolores in 2010, she said, in response to my question of why her husband goes to sea:

> We do not have family members and relatives in Hawaii. We have no one to rely on except him [husband]. If we had Hawaiianos, oh how much better it would be! We would be in a good position. That [seafaring] is our only source of life so what can we do?

That she looks at her husband's seafaring as ranking below migration to Hawaii, and that she looks at it in the context of migration to Hawaii, reveal how Hawaii looms large in the imagination and historical experience of San Gabriel. She not only refers to family members or relatives who would be able to financially help them but also, more crucially, alludes to the possibility of also moving to Hawaii. This is demonstrated further by the case of Leonora, 26 years old and mother of one child, who spurned what her parents saw as their golden opportunity to improve their material, economic, and social position by refusing to marry a "Hawaiiano" and marrying instead a seaman. According to her, her parents were disappointed (and she had to live with this disappointment, which her parents expressed in action even after several years have passed) that she threw away the chance that could have given not only her but also her entire natal family a more secure and better life. She herself would have been an immigrant with a real chance for permanent settlement in the USA, starting a chain migration for her natal family.

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[5]This estimate is based on a list of 120 seafarers I was able to draw up in 2010 from asking all the students of San Gabriel's biggest high school. To identify seafarers (and therefore potential wives I could interview) more quickly, I went to every class to ask students if they knew of anyone who was a seaman. During the fieldwork, I got to know of a few more. The figure of 150 is thus more or less a good indicator of the number of seafarers from San Gabriel.

She could have sponsored her parents' immigration to Hawaii, who in turn would be able to sponsor their other children's immigration to Hawaii, who will then sponsor their spouses' and children's immigration. (These spouses would also then be able to sponsor the immigration of their own parents, hence repeating and widening the cycle of immigration). Leonora's case reveals the hierarchy of migration reckoned through the social possibilities that it enables and the extent to which migration has become an escape route, a strategy for improving one's life chances. People recognize the different (and differentiated) possibilities afforded by settlement migration and temporary labor migration.

Dolores and Leonora were not the only wives who referred to Hawaii. Although my interview questions on the challenges obtaining in the absence of their husbands were never intended to bring up Hawaii, many of the interviewees framed their situation within the better possibilities offered by migration to Hawaii. Anita, 45 years old, mother of three children, and whose husband has been seafaring for 20 years (third engineer) summed this up:

Maymayat koma no Hawaii ta no idiay, makapagdedenna kami, makapagtrabaho kami, makapagtitinnulong kami agsapul. Agpayso, adda bassit nam-ay ngem adda met latta panagkamtud ata no nakabakasyon, awan met sapulna. Makaala ka pay sabali.

[It would be better if it's Hawaii, we could stay together, we could all work, we could all help each other make a living. True, we are better off now but there are times when we do not have any since he has no pay when he is at home. And you could sponsor others to follow.]

That Hawaii is quickly and readily drawn on in my conversations with the seamen's wives regarding migration clearly indicates how Hawaii has come to inform and shape their migration imagination and discourse. Hawaii could be seen as shorthand for settlement migration, but specifically to the USA, as it allows those already there to sponsor the immigration of parents and even unmarried adult children, which is not possible in other countries such as the UK and Norway, where Filipinos have also settled. How did Hawaii come to index better socio-economic opportunities and possibilities through migration? How did it acquire the status of a cultural signifier, a trope that represented the promise of migration—the possibilities for upward social and economic mobility? The following section explores these questions.

Ilocano migration to Hawaii and its impacts on Ilocos communities

The strong presence of people from San Gabriel in Hawaii and California follows the pattern established by Ilocano migration to Hawaii and California during the early years of the 1900s. The liberalization of US immigration laws in 1965 enabled the immigration of large numbers of Filipinos to the United States. Those who moved to Hawaii and California immediately after this liberalization were able to do so because of family members already there—those who went there to work as agricultural laborers. The history of Ilocano emigration to Hawaii and California in the 1900s is already well documented and established in the literature (see, for example, Espana-Maram, 2006; Griffiths, 1988; Lasker, 1931; Sharma, 1987; Teodoro, 1981), so only a brief discussion is provided below to provide the necessary context for this article.

From 1915 to 1946, the Ilocos provinces would become the major source of workers for Hawaii recruited by the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association (HSPA). Of 100,137 emigrants from the entire Philippines from 1916 to 1931, 67,279 came from the Ilocos region (Abra, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union and Pangasinan). Ilocos Norte alone contributed 30,641. In 1923, the first large group of Filipino workers, numbering more than 2,000, the majority of whom were Ilocanos, were recruited to work in California. The predominance of Ilocano workers among this group might be explained by the fact that 84 percent of them came from Hawaii (Espana-Maram, 2006). Between 1924 and 1930, with the establishment by steamship lines of better direct routes from Manila to Pacific Coast ports (such as, for example, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle), more Filipino workers arrived in California directly from the Philippines. By 1928, 57 percent of arrivals were from Manila. Nevertheless, the number of those who embarked from Hawaii remained significant at 35 percent (Espana-Maram, 2006: 19). This labor migration would pave the way for Filipino, but especially Ilocano, family-selective migration to Hawaii and California beginning in the mid-1960s.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 liberalized US immigration policy, and its family reunification provision accounted for the increase in Filipino immigration to the USA since. In particular, immediate family members of US citizens or permanent residents—parents, spouses and unmarried sons or daughters—contributed significantly to the continuing immigration of Filipinos to the USA. From 1981 to 2013, an annual average of 38,835 immigrated to the USA (CFO, 2013).

Studies that have looked at Ilocano migration to Hawaii have identified two significant social consequences on source communities: social inversion and the accentuation of economic differences (Griffiths, 1988; Lewis, 1971; Pertierra et al., 1992). A social inversion was put in motion by emigration between the landless but "moneyed" Hawaiianos and the Ilocos elites who were increasingly experiencing difficulties as a result of the deteriorating economic condition in the region. Henry Lewis (1971: 18), in his study of rice farmers in two barrios in a municipality of Ilocos Norte, noted that "a paradoxical situation developed where upper class landlords often mortgaged lands to their own tenants, at least those with savings income from relatives overseas" (see also Lasker, 1931: 252–253). In other cases, Griffiths (1988) explains that landlords in the Ilocos region sold their land to take advantage of two new opportunities—entry to the professions and politics—made available by American rule. These landlords used the proceeds to finance their children's education or their political ambitions. Unsurprisingly, it was village peasants with families and relatives in Hawaii who had the financial resources to buy these holdings (see also Young, 1982). In Ilocos, where farmland is especially scarce due to the region's physical characteristics and population density, land is a highly prized possession and ownership of it is a key indicator of one's (new) wealth and status. It is the "most valued and prestigious sign of economic well-being" (Griffiths, 1988: 55).

Emigration to Hawaii not only provided the resources by which the families of Hawaii emigrants acquired land. Griffiths (1988) points to how these resources led to an increase in and consolidation of material and economic resources among those already in possession of some measure of it. They had access to money to invest in agricultural and other business activities. This created a new form of social distinction as emigration to Hawaii created changes in people's "horizons of expectations" (Pertierra et al., 1992: 2) even as it also exacerbated inequality.

In San Gabriel today, many of the biggest and grandest houses, a number of which are uninhabited, are owned by those who immigrated to Hawaii and the US mainland by way of family connections established by the migration to Hawaii and California of Ilocanos as farm workers. To be sure, many other grand residences, by San Gabriel standards, have been built by those who went to the US as skilled migrants, by those who migrated to other countries, and by those working as seafarers. Yet, it is telling that when people initially comment on such houses, they say that a Hawaiiano perhaps owns it, especially when the identity of the owners and where they are working are not known beforehand. In this sense, "Hawaiiano" has come to stand in for those working overseas and who have made some financial and economic success to show for it.

In informal conversations I had in December 2013 with neighbors, former schoolmates, friends, and family members, when we touched on the topic of what we could do to improve our lives, one of the stock responses was "marry a Hawaiiano/Hawaiiana." Although frequently made in a jocular manner, such statements nevertheless express a social fact or truth.

Marrying a Hawaiiano or Hawaiiana clearly refers to a strategy of using settlement migration to improve personal and family social possibilities. Indeed, in interviews I conducted in 2014 for a project examining Filipino seafarers' negotiation of job insecurity, two women described their not having been married to their seafarer-partners as a strategic decision made according to family policy (*palisi*) or rule/regulation (*patakaran*). According to both women, it was the policy of their partners' parents not to allow their sons to marry just yet so as not to jeopardize their son's migration to Hawaii. These women, who now have children, have agreed to enter into a live-in partnership because, according to them, they themselves saw the wisdom and advantage of such a decision. Although San Gabriel is predominantly Roman Catholic, cohabitation is widely practiced and there is very little moral condemnation or even criticism for those who choose to enter into common law relationships and partnerships. Ilocanos have been seen to have a pragmatic and flexible attitude towards moral and sexual issues (Pertierra et al., 1992; Pingol, 2001) but especially with cohabitation linked to migration to Hawaii (Pe-Pua, 1991; cf. Williams et al., 2007). This approach has certainly served the purposes of migration to Hawaii and the USA and it is in it that such a flexible attitude towards cohabitation shows its instrumental deployment. When the two women finally marry their partners, they will be getting married to Hawaiianos because, by then, their seafarer-partners will have moved to Hawaii and come back to marry them, thus initiating the women's own move to Hawaii. That such a strategy is now understood and talked about as "policy," "decree" or "regulation" suggests a "codification" of a social and cultural practice that has sustained Ilocano migration to Hawaii and the mainland US. It speaks of how these women's and their family's lives in San Gabriel are oriented towards migration, specifically a future life in Hawaii.

Discussion and conclusion

This essay aimed to show, using the case of left-behind seafarer wives, that the left-behind are not only affected and changed by the cultural transformations (in values and ways of thinking) brought about by migration but also contribute to these transformations. They foster these values, thoughts, desires and aspirations, thereby helping to disseminate and

perpetuate a culture of migration. The meanings the seamen's wives invest in their husband's migration and the social possibilities they believe migration helps them realize justify and rationalize separation from their husbands. The images conjured by their explanations of why their husbands have to go away—images that simultaneously evoke both the hopes and aspirations pinned on migration and these women's participation in migration—show how migration depends on, because it is facilitated by, imagination. They also show how migration becomes a form of social navigation. The aspiration for a better life is encoded by such responses as *tapno makalung-aw* (to keep one's head above water so as not to drown), *tapno adda met raman ti kanen* (to have tasty or flavorful food), *tapno adda met bassit nam-ay* (to have a little bit of comfort). Migration is that which offers the promise of financial well-being and security so that one can eventually leave a life that revolves around debt (*utang met la ti pagpuligosan*). The women's sharing in the cognition of migration as a form of social navigation helps to account for how they nurture and foster a culture of migration. The account of culture of migration Massey et al. (1998) provide refers exclusively to those undertaking the migration itself and the cultural transformations their repeated migrations engender. This article shows that one way of linking left-behind wives to a culture of migration is through a consideration of their "imaginative" investments into their husband's migration. Focusing on them has enabled this article to show the "social, emotional and existential stakes" (Lucht, 2012: 185) of the wives not only on the labor migration of their husbands as seafarers but also on migration, more generally consequently revealing a mentality that shows a culturally shaped preference for migration that extends it (migration) to other members of the family. Such chain migration harks back to the family-selective stream of migration (Liu et al., 1991) put in motion by the migration of Ilocano workers to Hawaii and California in the early 1900s.

   Discussions of a culture of migration in the Philippines have focused on national and regional–global historical, economic, and social conditions, as well as the state policies, that have vitally contributed to its development and persistence. They have looked at it at the national level. Although the Ilocano migration to Hawaii is frequently cited, it is to support a perspective of a culture of migration developed at the national level. There are, however, recent works that (although it is not their explicit intention to) provide more locally contextualized and nuanced discussion of a culture of migration. In his ethnographic study of cultures of relatedness and overseas migration in a Batangas village, Aguilar provides a most cogent and insightful elucidation of this village's culture of migration (Aguilar, 2009a, 2013; see also Aguilar, 2009b).

This article tracks the social and economic referents of the left-behind women's statements on migration to Hawaii through examining its impact on the economic, social, and cultural life of Ilocano communities. In doing so, the history of Ilocano migration to Hawaii is used to illuminate the migration imagination and discourse of a particular Ilocos town. Through the prism of the experiences and insights of seamen's wives in this town, this article provides, albeit in preliminary form, a description of what could be an Ilocano culture of migration. The movement of Ilocanos to Hawaii, which began in the early 20th century and which continues to this day, and the socio-economic improvement this movement brought into the lives of those who moved there or those closely related to them, have profoundly shaped the migration imagination of Ilocanos. This article shows that among Ilocanos, particularly in Ilocos Norte, their culture of migration is heavily informed by Ilocano migration to Hawaii and what Hawaii has come to stand for in the historical experience of migration in Ilocos. There is a preference for migration that enables the migrant to petition for the immigration not only of spouses and minor children but also of parents (and in cases where the parents are the immigrants, their adult, single children). This preference for Hawaii/the US mainland (mainly California) might be linked to the considerably better economic opportunities that could be shared or distributed. In other words, because migration represents for many families their only real means of obtaining a better life and future, migration to Hawaii/the US mainland itself becomes a resource that becomes distributed and sustained.

Admittedly, what I have described here is but a component of a culture of migration. The statements of the seamen's wives that indicate their preference for migration to Hawaii clue us in to the socio-cultural and historical context that shaped this preference. This preference is part of a culture of migration that puts a premium on sharing the benefits of migration by enabling migration. This is to say, the cultural value placed on migration is fundamentally linked to a consideration of the family. This is what one wife referred to as *makaala ka pay* (one can get [petition] others to immigrate). This extension of the possibility to migrate is related to a term frequently used to refer to migration to Hawaii (and California), *makatawing*, which comes from the Ilocano word, *tawing*, the act of drawing water from a well. The preference for migration to Hawaii therefore points not only to a concern for getting or bringing in others; it also reveals a deep concern for lifting up others or lifting them out of their present condition, thereby helping improve their lives permanently. Thus, the act of *tawing* both refers to the process of chain migration and, metaphorically, to migration as the water being drawn, a basic resource of life.

The socio-cultural theme of sharing or extending better social possibilities by enabling migration encoded by *makaala* and *makatawing* are inextricably bound up with the affordances gained from and witnessed through Ilocano migration to Hawaii and California. A flexible attitude towards cohabitation (or more commonly, living in) is a social and cultural strategy that has been adapted in order to sustain, or keep open the possibility of, migration. This points to the development of a culture of waiting, of leading a life inextricably linked to the lives of their sponsors in Hawaii. People wait until their sponsors become US permanent residents or citizens; in other words, until they are eligible to file for their petition to sponsor them. Meanwhile, life goes on, children are born and grow up. A wedding that would otherwise have occurred before children are born now occurs as a rite that prefigures migration, done to initiate the spouse's and children's move to Hawaii.

While it is true that Ilocanos, like other Filipinos, have migrated to other parts of the world, contract labor migration exists below migration to Hawaii. Others have migrated to countries that offer settlement but only to the migrant's nuclear family. This stream of movement under this kind of migration regime also offers good social and economic possibilities, and indeed many in San Gabriel have left the country through this regime. Nevertheless, these destination countries such as Spain, Norway, and Italy do not as yet exercise the same degree of influence in the historical experience and migration imagination of people in San Gabriel. This is not only because migration to these countries is relatively recent and less significant in terms of number compared to Ilocano migration to Hawaii. For the left-behind wives, Hawaii stands for settlement migration to the USA or to other countries that allow the migrant to sponsor the migration of parents (e.g., Canada) or unmarried adult children. In addition, Hawaii stands for settlement migration that enables better social possibilities because such settlement migration is more extensive, that is, not limited to the migrant's "nuclear" family. Thus, a Filipino culture of migration as it has developed at least in one town in the Ilocos provinces has to be understood not only in light of the long history of Ilocano migration to Hawaii (and the USA) but also in the affordances and possibilities settlement migration there provides. Further research could look at other migrant source communities to understand how their particular histories of emigration have shaped the cultures of migration that emerged from their migration experiences.

Acknowledgments

article, Liezel Longboan for reading an early version, and Ralph Buiser for help with obtaining up-to-date figures on seamen's salaries. This article is for my wife, Marilyn.

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