**Women who stay: Seafaring and subjectification
in an Ilocos town**
By Roderick G. Galam
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Women who stay explores what its author, Roderick G. Galam, calls the "gendered subjectification" of the wives of Filipino seafarers employed in the global maritime industry, women who enable the migration of others by staying behind. Galam's "phenomenology of staying behind" involves the conceptual elaboration of this experience by "situating the women in spousal, family, kin, and wider social relations, thus demonstrating gender and subjectivity as 'lived relations'" (Galam 2018, 3). By looking closely at the strivings of seafarers' wives and their families, the book hopes to clarify the dialectic between the subjective and the social by disclosing how structural forces become manifest in the lived realities of concrete social relations (2018, 191).

The author also considers how wives of seafarers play a vital role in enabling and sustaining the labor migration of their husbands, arguing that "examining their subjectification within and through this process and experience of migration provides a critical standpoint from which to reveal how they have acted on, and been acted upon by, their world" (5). This dialectical framing is seen in the author's pursuit of a "generative" account of subjectivity wherein unity, durability, and coherence of the self are achieved by women even as "modes of thought, reflection, feeling, sentiment, and action" are also imagined as shaped by temporal and spatial locations as well as social structures and cultural formations (5–7).

Set against the imperatives of the global market for seafaring labor and the disruptive reality of their husbands' migration, biographical coherence for these women consists in what the author calls "dynamic unity of change through time" (6; quoting McNay 2000, 74). Through concepts, such as *lung-aw* (keeping one's head above water, having a better life), which bring together notions of a "better life" with migration as "navigation", a range of communicative practices based on the affordances of mobile communication technology and Internet-enabled communication, the translation of work into leisure through notions of *dibersyon* (something done to occupy the time) and *isu pay* (of not wasting anything), and their project of relational autonomy as *panagbukbukod* (independence or autonomy, having a life that is one's own), the author discerns "a hopeful and strategic subjectivity" that "concretizes the coherence and durability of the women's selves" (Galam 2018, 59–191).

The women play a "waiting game" wherein quotidian lives and practices are linked to a future horizon in a singular trajectory (2018, 7–187). Indeed, the book is an argument against the special attention anthropology has paid to

experiential ruptures, instances when individuals are unable to make themselves or their worlds whole. "[Critical] attention should not neglect subjective formations that happen in 'more settled forms of social and cultural order'" and that "[subjectivities] should not be associated only with extremely negative or difficult conditions of suffering" (6). The author also takes aim at the negative conception of the subject associated with Foucault and Butler which, he points out, does not adequately account for "the way a subject understands and locates itself temporally" (7).

The notion of "dynamic unity of change through time" allows the book to avoid/evade the essentialist/anti-essentialist dualism saddling contemporary debate and conversation on identity. Identity may be a fictive unity, but it is, nonetheless, "lived as a coherent (if not always stable) experiential sense of self", so says Gilroy (1993, 102). This assumption is apparently behind the book's ambition to explore, phenomenologically, the self as a coherent narrative production, while accounting for it sociologically, i.e., clarifying how subjectivity is shaped by "structures and cultural formations" even as it is grasped "as becoming… [and not] structural dependence" (Galam 2018, 5; quoting Biehl and Locke 2010, 337).

The author argues that coherence is achieved through what Sennett calls "sustained human relations and durable purposes" through which lives are oriented (Galam 2018, 8; quoting Sennet 1998, 98). Simply put, subjectivity "is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds 'outside' and the identities which they offer" (Hall 2005, 597). This deserves more careful elaboration beyond what the book provides. The idea that people struggle for biographical coherence while being shaped by social structures and cultural formations is a good reason to explicitly situate analyses within perspectives that clearly resolve the antinomy of structure and agency. A generative account of subjectivity seems to demand nothing less.

Hall's conception of identity as "identification" would be particularly useful here. Hall conceives of identity as a meeting point between, on the one hand, discourses and practices which slot us into place as social subjects, and on the other hand, processes that produce subjectivities (1996, 5–6). Identity is, therefore, a "temporary stabilization of meaning… [the] suturing or stitching together of the discursive 'outside' with the 'internal' processes of subjectivity" (Barker 2000, 386). This should lead to a more compelling account of how structural forces are manifested in the lives of the women, even as they engage in the agentic process of "crafting" coherent selves (Kondo 1990).

A similar opportunity is missed where the author, this time citing McNay's invocation of Bourdieu (McNay 2008), discusses how hope and hopefulness "[obtain] in the concrete socio-cultural contexts of these women" (Galam

2018, 190) . Hope is said to be "both the product of power relations that have been internalized into the body and also of an active engagement with social structures" (McNay 2008, 185). McNay is clearly referencing the "habitus", yet the author does not follow through by engaging more fully with this concept. As historically inscribed generative schemes of perception, thought, and action (Bourdieu 1990, 54–5), this conceptual lens peels off the self-conscious and ideologically charged layers of representation allowing analysis to apprehend subtle yet important shifts in the construction of identities (Camposano 2009, 44–5).

As a refined way of thinking through the material practices of everyday life (Fiske 1992, 155), Bourdieu's habitus should pave the way for more nuanced analyses of women's routines, and what the author calls their "subjectifying potential… as activities that support life and the flourishing of individuals" (Galam 2018, 62–3). Importantly, this mediating principle is another way to steer clear of the structure/agency binary through its recognition of the inventive, non-mechanical production of practices. Which, in turn, enables sociology to "escape from the realism of the structure… without falling back into subjectivism, which is quite incapable of giving an account of the necessity of the social world" (Bourdieu 1990, 52).

Finally, crafting coherent selves involve contesting and negotiating asymmetries of power and dominant gender ideologies. This is manifested in the women's insistence on "co-resourcing" their households through the creative translation of work into leisure (Galam 2018, 136–37, 150), and in their struggle for relational autonomy (182). These aspects of women's subjectification suggest the need for a fluid conception of culture that is always negotiable and in the process of transformation. Rather than "disaggregating" the so-called "culture of migration" (43–5), which unfortunately betrays a functionalist concern with stabilizing norms, the author could have simply invoked Wright's notion of culture as "a contested process of meaning-making" in which meanings are re-worked and stretched by differently positioned social agents (Wright 1998, 5).

A concluding note on the research design: The material is richly textured, and the author did make use of observations and informal conversations "outside of the context of a research interview" (Galam 2018, 19). Nonetheless, the book's avowed goal of revealing how structural forces become manifest in lived relations and everyday practices would have been better served by an ethnographic, as against phenomenological, approach. The focus should be on discerning, not just the women's subjective reality, but more importantly, their local knowledge through participant observation; thus, in place of decontextualized talk, the book should have relied on naturally occurring, situated interactions where meanings are created and sustained (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995, 131–40).

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