

# TRANSNATIONAL MOTHERING: A SOURCE OF GENDER CONFLICTS IN THE FAMILY\*

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*Migration destabilizes families or what we think families should “look” like, as it forces the transformation of households from nuclear to transnational structures, challenges the traditional gender division of labor, and imposes the barrier of geographical distance on marital and intergenerational relations. Looking at the case of migration from the Philippines, this Article examines the effects of the feminization of migration on the family. This Article specifically looks at the emergence of transnational mothering and establishes the resistance in Philippine society against this type of parenting. This resistance, arguably, adversely affects intergenerational relations in the family and discourages the reconstitution of the gender division of labor in households. Instead, it encourages fathers to avoid housework, burdens female daughters and extended kin with greater household responsibility, and pressures geographically distant mothers to remain more active nurturers in the lives of their children than are physically present fathers. This Article concludes by making sense of this resistance to gender transformations in Philippine society and addressing the question of how receiving states that benefit from the labor of migrant women could help ease the gender woes that aggravate their family life in the process of migration.*

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#### INTRODUCTION

The Philippines deploys an average of one million workers annually or an average of three thousand workers per day.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, the majority of Filipino migrant workers have been women.<sup>2</sup> Women accounted for more than seventy percent of annually deployed migrant workers from 2000 to 2006.<sup>3</sup> Most Filipino migrant women—sixty-nine percent in 2006—work as caregivers, such as nannies and elderly care workers, as well as domestic workers, such as cleaners of private households.<sup>4</sup> They do so in more than 130 countries in Asia, Europe, and the Americas.<sup>5</sup> The outmigration of women from the Philippines suggests a gender transformation has taken place in Filipino society. Migration takes women outside of the confines of the home, thus disrupting the ideology of female domesticity—the notion that women are better suited to do household chores than are men. It also makes breadwinners out of women not only in the family but also in a nation that looks to migrant remittances as one of its largest sources of income from overseas.<sup>6</sup> In the Philippines, between thirty-four to fifty-three percent of the overall population depend on migrant remittances for their daily subsistence.<sup>7</sup>

This Article examines the constitution of gender in the transnational families of migrant mothers. It specifically looks at the experiences of children of migrant mothers to analyze how society responds to the forcible reconstitution of gender relations in the family spurred by women’s migration and how such responses impact the well-being of the children left behind in the Philippines in the

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1. See KANLUNGAN CTR. FOUND., FAST FACTS ON FILIPINO LABOR MIGRATION 2007, at 4 (2007) (on file with the North Carolina Law Review).

2. See *id.* at 3 (“Philippine labor migration has been described as one that wears a woman’s face . . .”).

3. See *id.*

4. *Id.* at 14.

5. RHACEL SALAZAR PARREÑAS, SERVANTS OF GLOBALIZATION: WOMEN, MIGRATION, AND DOMESTIC WORK 1 (2001).

6. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *The Care Crisis in the Philippines: Children and Transnational Families in the New Global Economy*, in GLOBAL WOMAN: NANNIES, MAIDS, AND SEX WORKERS IN THE NEW ECONOMY 39, 39–41 (Barbara Ehrenreich & Arlie Russell Hochschild eds., 2002).

7. Gina Mission, *The Breadwinners: Female Migrant Workers*, <http://gina.ph/WIN/issues/issue15/win15a.htm> (last visited Mar. 19, 2010).

process of maternal migration. Due to the feminization of migration, various migration “sending countries” have used transnational mothering as a strategy for household maintenance. Transnational mothering refers to the organizational reconstitution of motherhood that accommodates the temporal and spatial separations forced by migration. This arrangement forms new meanings of motherhood and expands the concept of “mothering” to encompass breadwinning.<sup>8</sup> The rise of transnational mothering is evident in various female migrant worker “sending countries,” including Sri Lanka,<sup>9</sup> Mexico,<sup>10</sup> and Poland.<sup>11</sup> In the Philippines, the non-governmental organization Kakammpi reports that approximately nine million children are growing up without at least one parent due to that parent’s migration.<sup>12</sup> “This figure represents approximately 27 percent of the overall youth population in the Philippines.”<sup>13</sup> While the gender breakdown of transnational parents is not available, one can assume that transnational mothering has inevitably resulted from Filipino labor migration considering that women have made up at least seventy percent of the newly hired migrant labor force from 2000 to 2006.<sup>14</sup>

Transnational mothering seems to force the rearrangement of gender because it not only removes mothers from the confines of the

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8. See Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo & Ernestine Avila, “*I’m Here, But I’m There*”: *The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood*, 11 GENDER & SOC’Y 548, 562–64 (1997) (“Rather than replacing caregiving with breadwinning definitions of motherhood, [Central American and Mexican women] appear to be expanding their definitions of motherhood to encompass breadwinning that may require long-term physical separations.”).

9. See generally MICHELLE RUTH GAMBURD, *THE KITCHEN SPOON’S HANDLE: TRANSNATIONALISM AND SRI LANKA’S MIGRANT HOUSEMAIDS* (2000) (detailing female labor migration from Sri Lanka).

10. See generally Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, *supra* note 8 (examining the impact of Latina immigrant migration on motherhood and child-rearing).

11. Sylwia Urbanska, Inst. of Sociology at the Univ. of Warsaw, *Mothers of the Nation as a Target of Public “Therapy”—Transnational Parenting and Moral Panic in Poland*, Paper Presentation at the Mosaics of Transnational Spaces Workshop, Krakow, Poland (May 9, 2009), available at [http://www.transnarodowosc.agh.edu.pl/abstrakt/abstrakt\\_Urbanska.pdf](http://www.transnarodowosc.agh.edu.pl/abstrakt/abstrakt_Urbanska.pdf).

12. RHACEL SALAZAR PARREÑAS, *UNDERSTANDING THE BACKLASH: WHY TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANT FAMILIES ARE CONSIDERED THE “WRONG KIND OF FAMILY” IN THE PHILIPPINES* 3 (2006), available at <http://globalchild.rutgers.edu/pdf/Salazar%20Parrenas%20Research%20Note.pdf> (citing KAKAMMPI, *NGO POSITION ON THE CHILDREN OF OVERSEAS WORKERS* (2004)).

13. *Id.*

14. See KANLUNGAN CTR. FOUND., *supra* note 1, at 3; see also Kanlungan Ctr. Found., *International Labor Migration 2008, Is Migration Still Feminized?*, (PowerPoint presentation) (on file with the North Carolina Law Review).

home, but it also redefines traditional mothering, which in the Philippines is historically defined as nurturing children in close proximity.<sup>15</sup> For instance, it is commonly believed that women's work outside the home should not interfere with their proper duties of nurturing children.<sup>16</sup> In the Philippines, the traditional gender division of the family relegates men (or fathers) to be the *haligi ng tahanan*, meaning pillar of the home, and women (or mothers) to be the *ilaw ng tahanan*, meaning light of the home.<sup>17</sup> The metaphorical reference to men as pillars establishes them as breadwinners whose primary duty is to sustain the household.<sup>18</sup> Women, as the "light of the home," "do not face the cultural and social pressure to acquire material goods for the family; instead, they are the ones who must bring radiance to the home" by nurturing the family.<sup>19</sup>

In her study of transnational families and migrant women in Sri Lanka, anthropologist Michelle Gamburg documented cultural transformations that result from women's migration.<sup>20</sup> Gamburg reported that women's migration initiates the reconstitution of gender relations and forces the rearrangement of household labor in transnational families.<sup>21</sup> More specifically, migration "distributes[s] a portion of women's household chores [including childcare] to men."<sup>22</sup> Yet, she also observed that families still depend on the work of

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15. BELEN T.G. MEDINA, *THE FILIPINO FAMILY* 219 (2d ed. 2001) ("[T]he mother assumes the bulk of child care responsibility because it is she who spends more time at home and has a more intimate relationship with the child."). "Nurturing children" refers to feeding, clothing, educating, and providing emotional support to children.

16. *See id.* ("The traditional belief is that employment of the mother leads both to the child's neglect and emotional deprivation, as well as to a communication breakdown between mother and child.").

17. RHACEL SALAZAR PARREÑAS, *THE FORCE OF DOMESTICITY: FILIPINA MIGRANTS AND GLOBALIZATION* 6 (2008); Maruja Milagros B. Asis, Shirlena Huang & Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *When the Light of the Home Is Abroad: Unskilled Female Migration and the Filipino Family*, 25 *SING. J. TROPICAL GEOGRAPHY* 198, 199 (2004).

18. MEDINA, *supra* note 15, at 151 ("It is a man's moral obligation to provide economic security to his wife and children. He is censured by society if he deserts or neglects his family."); RHACEL SALAZAR PARREÑAS, *CHILDREN OF GLOBAL MIGRATION: TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES AND GENDERED WOES* 57 (2005) ("As a pillar, it is he who makes the home stand and must metaphorically build a home for his family.").

19. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 57.

20. *See generally* GAMBURD, *supra* note 9 (documenting Sri Lankan female migration to "show how women . . . contest power relations with their families, job agents, moneylenders, and employers").

21. *Id.* at 173–92, 232 ("Labor migration has led to the commodification of 'women's work' and to shifts in local gender roles, caste hierarchies, and class relations. As individuals and families have negotiated these hierarchies, the power structures themselves have evolved and changed.").

22. *Id.* at 241.

female kin, suggesting that transnational households do not completely transform gender relations.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, she found that men conveniently avoid housework by drinking or relocating to another area for employment.<sup>24</sup> These two behavioral patterns suggest that a nuanced process of gender reconfiguration is at work in these families, one that involves a struggle between change and tradition.

A similar study on transnational families in Mexico found that women's migration only marginally transformed gender traditions, as men did not do more childcare as a result of women's migration.<sup>25</sup> Researcher Joanna Dreby instead noticed that female extended kin left behind in Mexico, including grandmothers and aunts, assisted transnational mothers with housework and childcare while they were absent from the home.<sup>26</sup>

Continuing the discussion led by migration scholars such as Gamburd and Dreby, this Article examines the constitution of gender in the Filipino transnational families of migrant women. Relying on an extensive ethnographic study on transnational families conducted in the Philippines over a span of eighteen months, this Article argues that the threat against gender traditions posed by women's migration leads to the vilification of transnational migrant mothers. They are regarded as bad mothers who have abandoned their proper and rightful duty to nurture their children in close proximity.<sup>27</sup> Coupled with a paternal refusal to nurture children, gender traditions remain stagnant in the transnational families of migrant women. At the same time other female kin—grandmothers, aunts, and eldest daughters—do the work of mothers in proxy,<sup>28</sup> thus maintaining the gender division of labor. Women continue to be the *ilaw ng tahanan*, the nurturers of the family,<sup>29</sup> and men remain the *haligi ng tahanan*, the

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23. *See id.* at 195–96 (“New consciousness of women’s roles and personal identities make women more critically aware of the gender hierarchies . . . . [However,] women remain at least partially rooted in older thought patterns and gender discourses that shape their sense of self and their concepts of ideal behavior.”).

24. *See id.* at 175–79, 238 (describing consuming alcohol, “an exclusively male activity,” as a means by which men can socialize and prove their wealth and masculinity).

25. Joanna Dreby, *Honor and Virtue: Mexican Parenting in the Transnational Context*, 20 *GENDER & SOC’Y* 32, 56 (2006) (“Migration does not appear to significantly transform notions of Mexican motherhood and fatherhood even though it does change parenting activities.”).

26. *See id.*

27. *See infra* Part II.

28. *See infra* Part III.B.

29. *See* PARREÑAS, *supra* note 17, at 6.

breadwinners of the family.<sup>30</sup> Given that the husbands of migrant women left behind in the Philippines maintain gainful employment, the stagnation of gender roles occurs despite migrant women's economic contributions to the family.

This Article begins with a description of the methodology that provides the qualitative data for my discussion on transnational mothering. Part II illustrates the backlash against mothers who have chosen to migrate, leaving their children behind, and argues that migrant mothers are vilified in the news media and in local communities. Part III illustrates the impact of this backlash, beginning with a description of how fathers reject the work of nurturing children that have been left behind by migrant mothers. This Part further offers a description of how female kin feel the burden of overwork and ends with a discussion of children's reported feelings of abandonment as a result of maternal migration. This Article argues that children feel abandoned not because they receive inadequate care when their mothers migrate but instead because they have been denied the provision of care that follows the traditional gender order of the family in the Philippines, which is that mothers are the nurturers of children and that fathers are breadwinners.<sup>31</sup> The Article concludes by illustrating how the continued stronghold of women's domesticity aggravates the difficulties of separation for both children and female kin, resulting in greater emotional difficulties for children and overextended workloads for female kin.

#### I. METHODOLOGY

This Article is based on ethnographic research conducted by the author in one area of the Central Philippines for eighteen months between January 2000 and April 2002. For the primary data, I conducted one- to three-hour in-depth and open-ended tape-recorded interviews with sixty-nine young adults who grew up in transnational migrant households. I supplemented these interviews with open-ended interviews of thirty-one of the interviewees' guardians.

Altogether, the interviews of thirty children of migrant mothers, twenty-six children of migrant fathers, and thirteen children with two migrant parents make up the primary portion of the data set.

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30. *See id.*

31. *Id.*

I conducted these interviews<sup>32</sup> in Tagalog, the national language of the Philippines. Most interviewees responded in Tagalog, but some used a combination of Tagalog, English, and the local dialect. I fully transcribed these interviews and then translated them into English.

To protect their anonymity, I have used pseudonyms for all interviewees. I collected an unsystematic sample of research participants using referrals shared by earlier interviewees. I identified interviewees by making classroom announcements and visiting business establishments that students frequent near school grounds. I conducted interviews in both public and private schools so as to generate a sample that is representative of diverse class backgrounds. To further ensure the diversity of my sample, I also identified interviewees using non-university-based networks of friends and relatives in the area.

I also conducted interviews with the children's guardians. I interviewed thirty-one guardians of twenty-eight children. I conducted the interviews with guardians not necessarily to check the validity of the information provided by the children but to gain an understanding of the roles and contributions of other members of the family in transnational household maintenance.

In order to include the perspective of younger children in my data, I supplemented the one-on-one interviews with a survey of 228 elementary and high school students from transnational migrant families. Two research assistants and I conducted this survey in all of the public elementary schools in one district in my research site and in one public high school and one private high school in the area of my research study, a regional district in the Central Philippines. The survey expands the perspective on the changes in family life initiated by migration, the role of extended kin in transnational household maintenance, the division of labor in the family, and the emotional state of children regarding transnational families.

Finally, to gather information of the community perspective toward transnational families, I conducted focus-group discussions with members of local community organizations and support groups for migrant workers and their families. I also interviewed guidance counselors, priests, and representatives of non-governmental and governmental organizations that work with transnational families. I

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32. Interviews were conducted in a quiet and private setting, usually my residence in the city center, since many of the interviewees resided in crowded student boarding houses or did not feel comfortable enough to talk about their transnational family life in their own homes amidst kin.

gathered secondary research materials in Manila, particularly surveys and census reports released by governmental and non-governmental organizations on the state of migration, the labor market, and the status of women in the Philippines, as well as media reports on transnational families.

This research methodology examines transnational families from the perspectives and experiences of those left behind by migrant workers in the Philippines and explains the gender traditions of mothers. The discussion presents the perspective of individuals whose narratives are accordingly shaped by their gendered expectations of the family, their gendered ideologies, and their notions of gender norms in the Philippines. This Article unravels these underlying gender views by not only demonstrating how the gender contestations in the family result in the resistance against the gender transformations spurred by women's migration but also by illustrating how this resistance leads to the difficulties of children growing up without their transnational mothers in the Philippines.

## II. THE BACKLASH AGAINST MIGRANT MOTHERS

What I want is, for example, what I see with other children. I see their mothers get frantic whenever they get hurt. They rush to their child's side, apply ointment on the wound. On my own, I do not get that attention. Then your mother should also brush your hair. You do that on your own without her.<sup>33</sup>

My mother's love was not enough. I would have wanted her next to me, so that I could feel her love. I feel it, but only a little bit. I know she loves me because she is working hard over there. She is working hard so that we could have everything we want and everything we need. Even when she is sick, she continues to work. . . . But still, I want her to be with me here every day. It's because since I was small it was only my grandparents showing me love. She was not here.<sup>34</sup>

Rosette Cabellero and Marinel Clemente are two young women who articulate their poignant longing to be nurtured by their migrant mothers. These quotes establish the strong ideology that undergirds the views of children such as Rosette and Marinel on the type of

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33. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 123 (quoting nineteen-year-old Rosette Cabellero, daughter of a domestic worker in Qatar). The ages of all interviewees are dated as of the time period of the interviews.

34. *Id.* at 124 (ellipsis in original) (quoting seventeen-year-old Marinel Clemente, daughter of a nurse working in Libya).

nurturing they should be receiving from a mother. Their comments suggest they feel that a mother should be nurturing her children up-close. This idealistic view of mothering that both Rosette and Marinel articulate, one that undeniably evokes the picture of a stay-at-home mother who provides continuous care in proximity, is one shared by other children of transnational mothers in the Philippines.<sup>35</sup> Class, age, gender, and household structure—whether two parent or single parent—do not seem to shift their views on how mothers should nurture their children.

The sentiments of children such as Rosette and Marinel did not emerge in a vacuum. Instead, they reflect the dominant societal view on transnational mothers, specifically the view that these mothers abandon their children in the process of migration.<sup>36</sup> Philippine society views migrant mothers as having abandoned their children because society believes that (1) mothers are the best nurturers of their children and (2) fathers left behind are “naturally” incapable caregivers of the family.<sup>37</sup>

#### A. *Negative News Reports on Migrant Mothers*

A sweeping look at various newspaper headlines about migrant mothers indicates a perception that mothers abandon their children and leave them vulnerable to abuse when they migrate. While the headline “*Overseas Job vs Family Stability*”<sup>38</sup> equates transnational life with instability, other headlines reveal the supposed causes of this instability. For instance, the headline “*‘Sleeping Beauty’ Gets Raped*

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35. See Rhacel Parreñas, *Long Distance Intimacy: Class, Gender and Intergenerational Relations Between Mothers and Children in Filipino Transnational Families*, 5 GLOBAL NETWORKS 317, 333 (2005) (“Again and again children describe the nurturing provided by transnational mothers as ‘not enough.’”).

36. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Mothering from a Distance: Emotions, Gender, and Intergenerational Relations in Filipino Transnational Families*, 27 FEMINIST STUD. 361, 381 (2001) (“[T]he denial of maternal love is regarded as child abuse in the diaspora.”). This Article’s assertions regarding the perception of migrant mothers as having abandoned their children are based on my visits with various community groups as well as on a survey of articles that appeared in Philippine dailies published between 1993 and 1998. These dailies are stored in the library of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, which catalogues all media reports on migrant Filipino workers.

37. See *id.* at 381–82 (describing the crisis that arose when mothers began migrating and fathers were left to assume untraditional roles). The author describes a 1994 cover of *Tinig Filipino* depicting a family gathered around holiday decorations without a mother; the picture suggests that mothers, not fathers, are supposed to care for children. *Id.*

38. Lorie Toledo, *Overseas Job vs Family Stability*, PEOPLE’S J., Dec. 15, 1993, at 4 (on file with the North Carolina Law Review) (stating that children of absentee parents have turned into liabilities for society).

*While Her Mom Works as DH [Domestic Helper] in Hong Kong*<sup>39</sup> alludes to the inadequacy of safety of children of migrant mothers, and “*Education of OFWs [Overseas Filipino Workers] Children Being Sacrificed*”<sup>40</sup> suggests they are not receiving sufficient guidance.

With sensationalist media reports about the welfare of children of transnational mothers circulating in news dailies in the Philippines, it is not surprising that the public views children such as Rosette and Marinel as abandoned.<sup>41</sup> They are without the proximate care, the up-close nurturing, of their mothers—in this case, their biological mothers.

The negative view associated with women’s migration seems to haunt migrant mothers not only in the Philippines but also in many other domestic worker “sending countries,” including Poland and Romania.<sup>42</sup> For example, a recent article in the *New York Times* quotes economist Radu Soviani as calling the outmigration of women a “national tragedy,”<sup>43</sup> one that has triggered social upheaval in Romania.<sup>44</sup> The article blames not only the collapse of the Romanian family but also the abandonment and delinquency of children on maternal migration.<sup>45</sup> The article further attributes the severe psychological difficulties among children, including suicide for a sizeable number of them, to the migration of mothers.<sup>46</sup>

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39. ‘*Sleeping Beauty*’ Gets Raped While Her Mom Works as DH in Hong Kong, PEOPLE’S TONIGHT, July 16, 1993, at 11 (on file with the North Carolina Law Review) (recounting the story of a young rape victim who says she did not tell anyone about the incident until her mother returned from Hong Kong).

40. Mac Cabrerros, *Edukasyon ng mga Anak ng OFWs Nasasakripisyo [Education of OFWs Being Sacrificed]*, ABANTE, June 23, 1997, at 5 (on file with the North Carolina Law Review).

41. Interestingly, the public does not seem to disdain migrant fathers like it does migrant mothers. I did not find negative stories of migrant fathers in the library of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration. I make this assertion based on the absence of news reports on fathers.

42. See Urbanksa, *supra* note 11, at 1; Dan Bilefsky, *In Romania, Children Left Behind Suffer the Strains of Migration*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 15, 2009, at A10. In Poland, the children of domestic workers are commonly referred to as “Euro-orphans,” a term suggesting the “abandonment” of children for the care of families in Western Europe. Urbanksa, *supra* note 11, at 1 (noting that the term “Euro-orphans” describes “mainly . . . migrants’ children”).

43. Bilefsky, *supra* note 42.

44. *Id.* (documenting the suicides of fourteen children left behind, and reporting that children left behind by their mothers are at a greater risk of depression).

45. See *id.* (reporting the findings of a study which concluded that children of migrant parents are at a higher risk of abusing alcohol, getting into legal trouble, and “underperforming in school”).

46. See *id.* (reporting the suicides of fourteen children as well as the opinion of psychologist Denisa Ionescu that children are at a higher risk of suffering from depression when the mother is the migrant parent).

How do we explain the vilification of migrant mothers in countries such as the Philippines and Romania? Why is there a moral compulsion to equate their migration with the abandonment of children? After all, migrant mothers do provide for the children they have “left behind” with monthly remittances and, moreover, see to the daily care of their children by other kin.<sup>47</sup> Women are attempting to reconstitute mothering in spite of their migration,<sup>48</sup> but society, as demonstrated by newspaper accounts claiming that children get raped and do poorly in school because of maternal migration,<sup>49</sup> seems to resist their efforts and insists on holding mothers accountable to the ideology of women’s domesticity. These articles suggest children are vulnerable and susceptible to abuse if not nurtured by their mothers. Yet, the increase in maternal migration suggests mothers are not constrained and do not want to retain such an ideology.

By questioning the societal lament over the separation of children from their migrant mothers, I do not deny the struggles that individuals confront as a result of the forcible separation of the family in migration. Instead, this Article calls attention to the fact that the problems confronted by children such as Rosette are not so much caused by their mother’s migration but rather by societal resistance against the efforts of migrant mothers to redefine mothering. More specifically, this Article argues that the refusal of “sending societies,” such as the Philippines and Romania, to recognize the redefinition of mothering spurred by women’s migration is what aggravates children’s emotional difficulties.

Illustrating the ideological belief that women’s rightful place is in the home, headlines on May 26, 1995, from two of the largest circulating newspapers in the Philippines read, “*Overseas Employment a Threat to Filipino Families*”<sup>50</sup> and “*Ramos Says Pinay*

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47. In my research, all the children received a monthly remittance. See also THE CARE CHAIN (Vrijzinnig Protestantse Radio Omroep [Liberal Protestant Radio Broadcasting Company] 2000) (documenting why migrant mothers must leave the Philippines for work and send remittance payments to their children in the Philippines, and describing those mothers’ experiences away from their families in the Philippines).

48. See generally Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, *supra* note 8 (examining how the “meanings of motherhood” change to “accommodate these special and temporal separations”).

49. See ‘*Sleeping Beauty*’ Gets Raped While Her Mom Works as DH in Hong Kong, *supra* note 39 (reporting that a fourteen-year-old girl did not report her rape until her mother returned from working overseas); Bilefsky, *supra* note 42 (reporting that children of migrant mothers are more likely to underperform in school).

50. Ramos: *Overseas Employment a Threat to Filipino Families*, PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER, May 26, 1995 (on file with the North Carolina Law Review). Although President Ramos noted that the government was “not against overseas employment of

*OCWs [Overseas Contract Workers] Threaten Filipino Families.*<sup>51</sup> In a speech delivered to the Department of Social Welfare the day prior, Philippines President Fidel Ramos called for initiatives to keep migrant mothers at home.<sup>52</sup> As President Ramos stated, “‘We are not against overseas employment of Filipino women. We are against overseas employment at the cost of family solidarity . . . .’”<sup>53</sup> By calling for the return migration of mothers, President Ramos did not altogether disregard the increasing economic dependence of the Philippines on the foreign remittances of its mostly female migrant workers. However, he did make clear that only single and childless women are those who are morally permitted to pursue labor migration.<sup>54</sup>

Echoing the President’s reprimand of migrant mothers, public discourse and the media’s pathological descriptions of transnational families continue to vilify women.<sup>55</sup> Despite their questionable basis,

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Filipino women,’ ” he expressed concern that the “rising numbers of ‘abused and exploited children’ ” was partly due to Filipino women leaving the country for employment overseas. *Id.*

51. *Ramos Says Pinay OCWs Threaten Filipino Families*, PHILIPPINE STAR, May 26, 1995 (on file with the North Carolina Law Review). In light of the perceived “threat to the Filipino family” caused by Filipino women leaving the country to work abroad, President Ramos stated that providing job opportunities within the Philippines was the only way to keep women from leaving and thus maintaining the solidarity of Filipino families. *Id.*

52. *See Ramos: Overseas Employment a Threat to Filipino Families*, *supra* note 50.

53. *Id.*

54. The Family Code of the Philippines enumerates numerous “Rights and Obligations Between Husband and Wife.” FAMILY CODE, E.O. 209, art. 68, *reprinted in* 14 ANN. REV. POPULATION L. 397, 404 (1987). According to Article 68 of the Family Code, “[t]he husband and wife are obliged to live together, observe mutual love, respect, and fidelity, and render mutual help and support.” *Id.* The Code specifically mentions “family solidarity” in Article 69, stating that in deciding whether a spouse may live apart from the other (to work abroad, for example), a court may refuse to allow such a living arrangement if it would be detrimental to “the solidarity of the family.” FAMILY CODE, E.O. 209, art. 69, *reprinted in* 14 ANN. REV. POPULATION L., *supra*, at 404. Article 213 further emphasizes the importance of the mother’s presence in a child’s life, stating that upon separation of the parents, “[n]o child under seven years of age shall be separated from the mother unless the court finds compelling reasons to order otherwise.” The FAMILY CODE, E.O. 209, art. 213, *reprinted in* 14 ANN. REV. POPULATION L., *supra*, at 422. Finally, Article 15, Section 1 of the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines specifically names the “Filipino family as the foundation of the nation.” CONST. (1987), Art. XV, (Phil.). As such, the nation is obliged to “strengthen [the family’s] solidarity and actively promote its total development.” *Id.*

55. Various captions reveal this propensity in the media. While the caption “*Overseas Job vs Family Stability*” equates transnational family life with instability, *see Toledo, supra* note 38, at 4, other captions reveal the supposed causes of this instability. For instance, the caption “‘*Sleeping Beauty*’ Gets Raped While Her Mom Works as DH in Hong Kong” points to the inadequate protection of children in these families. *See supra* note 39 and accompanying text. The caption “*Education of OFW’s [Overseas Filipino Workers]*”

the media's negative depiction of transnational families, particularly those of migrant mothers, instills in the public consciousness the view that migration facilitates moral degeneracy in transnational families. This degeneracy supposedly results in the instability of family life and the consequent use of "drugs, gambling, and drinking" among children of migrant workers.<sup>56</sup> Sensationalist reports on the well-being of children in transnational families fuels the vilification of migrant mothers, whose migration is equated with the abandonment and consequent emotional and psychological difficulties suffered by their children.<sup>57</sup> Yet, in the course of vilifying migrant mothers, news media reports leave fathers free of any responsibility for the care of children. The media presumes that men are naturally incompetent caregivers of the family. Not one of the many articles that blame the migration of mothers for the social problems of children asks whether fathers left behind are helping children adjust to the absence of their mothers.<sup>58</sup> The lack of attention given to fathers by default absolves them of responsibility for care.

*B. Negative Sentiments on Transnational Mothers in the Community*

Public discourse in the media does not disagree with mainstream views in the community. Based on discussions with local community

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*Children Being Sacrificed*" establishes the insufficient guidance of children and the effect of Filipino migration four years later. Cabreros, *supra* note 40. Finally, the absence of emotional security is reported a year later, in the article "OFWs' Kids Emotionally Troubled." Lynette L. Corporal, *OFWs' Kids Emotionally Troubled*, MANILA STANDARD, Aug. 18, 1998, at 1 (on file with the North Carolina Law Review).

56. See Susan Fernandez, *Pamilya ng OFWs Maraming Hirap [Families of OFWs Have Many Hardships]*, ABANTE, Jan. 27, 1997, at 5 (on file with the North Carolina Law Review).

57. See, e.g., Francis Santamaria, *Problems Regarding Family Relations and Children of Migrant Workers*, in *FILIPINO WOMEN OVERSEAS CONTRACT WORKERS: AT WHAT COST?* 69, 69–72 (Mary Ruby Palma-Beltran & Aurora Javate de Dios eds., 1992) (describing the separation anxiety a child experiences "when Mommy leaves for the office").

58. See Cabreros, *supra* note 40 (quoting an unnamed official from the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration as saying that "[a] mother's care is different," supporting the article's supposition that children of OCWs—particularly those without their mothers—have a lower quality of life); Ramos: *Overseas Employment a Threat to Filipino Families*, *supra* note 50 (noting President Ramos's desire to "convince women to remain in the country with their families," without reference to male overseas workers); Ramos Says Pinay OCWs Threaten Filipino Families, *supra* note 51 (reporting that although Filipino "parents had to be given security . . . to keep the family unit together," President Ramos called for initiatives to keep women from leaving the country for work); *Sleeping Beauty' Gets Raped While Her Mom Works as DH in Hong Kong*, *supra* note 39 (stating that the victim reported the crime to police only after her mother returned from Hong Kong—there was no mention of the father's involvement).

organizations,<sup>59</sup> it was quite clear that community groups, despite their economic dependence on labor migration, had not looked favorably to the gender transformations engendered by migration. They frowned upon its threat to the roles of men and women in the family. One extensive quote from a father who recently returned from abroad and whose wife now works as a domestic worker in the capital city of Manila describes how the migration of parents ruptures the gender division of labor in parenting:

Mothers today, in the absence of the [migrant] father, are finding it in themselves to become strict. That is what is happening to families here in our town. So children are getting confused. Before the father left, he was the disciplinarian and the mother was the pacifier. So when they are disciplined, it is the mother explaining what is going on.

When I was gone, my wife was assuming the role of the disciplinarian. My children were confused. They were wondering why their mother suddenly become [sic] the disciplinarian when she had been the pacifier. They did not understand why they were being punished and scolded . . . . [N]ow it is my wife who is gone, in Manila. I am having a hard time. Because I am a man and we are not nurturing to our children. We are a little bit stern. Maybe it is because of the macho image expected of us?<sup>60</sup>

Besides expecting men to be disciplinarians, members of the communities also felt strongly that it is better if mothers are left with the children and fathers are those who pursue work abroad. A male return migrant expresses this view:

Basically, the role of the mother is very different from the role of the father. Sometimes, when the mother is away, the father becomes misguided. So what happens is that it results to a bigger problem with the family . . . . It is seldom that you can see a harmonious behavior from a child when the father is left

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59. With a research assistant, I gathered interviews with officers of each of these organizations and conducted focus-group discussions with members of five organizations. I arranged the focus group discussions weeks ahead of time and with the cooperation of officers arranged to hold discussions with the most active members of each organization. Focus group discussions ranged from four to fifteen individuals in size. They were approximately one hour in length. The discussions addressed problems and issues family members regularly confront in running transnational households, for instance, issues concerning the reintegration of the migrant parent and the struggles of raising children single-handedly or from a distance.

60. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 46.

behind to take care of the children. There are a lot of pain and regrets that a child had, that he or she wishes a different situation so that things may be a lot different. . . . They are really neglected.<sup>61</sup>

In general, opinions of members of community groups indicate that transnational families of migrant mothers are worse off than those of migrant fathers. This is because fathers left behind are presumed by many not to be “naturally” prone to childcare. In fact, some suggest that they are naturally averse to it. One wife of a male migrant worker remarks:

Well, I think it's much better if the fathers leave, because mothers can do it better, to play the role of both the mother and the father. But if the mother leaves, what's likely to happen is that the father cannot play the role of the mother, for the children. Not unless the father does not have any vice, does not smoke, does not drink or gamble. And men have this tendency to (pause), because in the marital relationship, if the mother is absent, the father might look for another one (Pause. Then laughs.). It's just natural, right? It's just natural, their natural needs, and if that happens, for sure the children will not be taken care of very well (Pause.). If the husband drinks, for sure, every afternoon, he will be found in a drinking session (Pause.). It's always better for children to come home in the afternoon with a parent in the home. What if the father who is left behind is not there and is spending his time drinking? It's an advantage if the father is the one to leave and work, (pause) because the mother can take the role of being the mother and the father, but the father, most likely he cannot play both roles. Men who do not have vices? You can only count them [and gestures with her hands, counting off on her fingers].<sup>62</sup>

Other participants did not disagree.<sup>63</sup>

While opinions of focus-group discussion participants “convey strict gender boundaries of mothering and fathering, they do give greater flexibility to concepts of mothering than they do to concepts of fathering.”<sup>64</sup> For instance, mothers can “mother and father,” but

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61. *Id.* at 45 (ellipses in original).

62. *Id.* at 44. This interviewee is a stay-at-home mother in her forties.

63. The families of migrant mothers could not share their own perspectives, as they were conspicuously absent from the discussion group. I also could not observe whether these claims ring true for the children of migrant women growing up under the care of their fathers or other relatives in this specific town.

64. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 45.

fathers can only be breadwinners and cannot take on mothering roles, such as nurturing and caring for children.<sup>65</sup> One respondent, a wife of a seafarer, describes:

If the mother is not with them, especially that it is really the mother who takes care of the children, prepares for their need. Unlike with the father, he is only the breadwinner of the family. All he does is give his earning to the mother and it is really the mother who manages everything in the house. So most of the time the children really run to the mother. Even if the father is abroad, as long as the mother is in the home, it is better.<sup>66</sup>

Research participants usually limited their definitions of fathering to breadwinning. Additionally, they asserted the view of fathers as incompetent care providers. This conventional view of the family resonates in all of the interviews and group discussions conducted with community representatives.

### III. THE CONSEQUENCES

This Part describes the adverse results of the dismal view of transnational mothers in Philippine society. When mothers migrate, husbands left behind in the Philippines are not redefining fathering despite the fact that migrant women are taking on breadwinning via the provision of monthly financial remittances and making it a salient feature of mothering.<sup>67</sup> In contrast to fathers, the women left behind are those taking up the slack in childcare that results from women's migration.<sup>68</sup> This leads to the overwork of female kin. This Part ends with a description of the feelings of abandonment among children of migrant mothers.

#### A. *Absentee Fathers*

According to young adult children of migrant mothers, fathers do not perform much childcare or household maintenance in the family, nor do they increase the amount of their household responsibilities in spite of the greater economic contributions of migrant women to the family.<sup>69</sup> This demonstrates that "mother-away" transnational families

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65. *Id.*

66. *Id.*

67. In the Philippines, husbands of migrant mothers rarely provide primary care for their children. Instead, other women, including elder daughters, aunts, and grandmothers, become the primary caregivers. *Id.* at 109–21.

68. *See id.*

69. See *supra* note 7 and accompanying text for a discussion about female remittances; see also ALICIA TADEO PINGOL, REMAKING MASCULINITIES: IDENTITY,

face a “stalled revolution” similar to the one identified by Arlie Hochschild in the 1980s among dual-income earning couples in the United States.<sup>70</sup> Men left behind in the Philippines tend to forego the caring responsibilities that migrant mothers cannot perform given their geographical distance.<sup>71</sup> Only four of thirty interviewees relied on their fathers for their primary care during adolescence. Instead, other women cared for them, who were usually domestic workers for those from middle-class families and elder daughters or female extended kin for those in lower middle-class families. Yet, this finding should not come as a surprise as it agrees with studies on other types of household forms in the Philippines. In her study on fertility and family time allocation among 3,327 nuclear-based families in one province of the Philippines, Jill Tiefenthaler found that fathers devote a small amount of time to housework and fail to increase their allocated family time even upon the birth of their children.<sup>72</sup>

The rejection of traditional women’s work by fathers left behind in the Philippines indicates that fathers stagnate gender boundaries in the family: they refuse to reciprocate for women’s greater economic contributions to household income by doing more housework. Many are like the emotionally absent father of Isabelle Tirador, a twenty-three-year-old college student whose mother had worked outside the country for at least seventeen years and whose father had always had an unstable income from his auto-body shop in Manila. In my study, for instance, only four of thirty children of migrant mothers said that their fathers did a high level of what is considered traditional women’s work in the family. This work would include cooking, housekeeping, and helping children with homework. Moreover, the majority of the fathers of children left behind in the Philippines by migrant mothers actually relocated to another island of the Philippines, as is the case with Isabelle’s father, who lives in Manila while his children reside on an island that is a twenty-four hour boat

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POWER, AND GENDER DYNAMICS IN FAMILIES WITH MIGRANT WIVES AND HOUSEHUSBANDS 33–36 (2001) (recounting stories of some men who do take on household chores while noting that others “feel threatened” by their dependence on their wives).

70. ARLIE HOCHSCHILD WITH ANNE MACHUNG, *THE SECOND SHIFT: WORKING PARENTS AND THE REVOLUTION AT HOME* 12 (1989) (“This strain between the change in women and the absence of change in much else leads me to speak of a ‘stalled revolution.’”).

71. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 98–103.

72. Jill Tiefenthaler, *Fertility and Family Time Allocation in the Philippines*, 23 *POPULATION & DEV. REV.* 377, 385 (1997) (“The results support the notion that Filipino men devote very little time to home production.”).

ride away from their father. As Isabelle complains: “It’s annoying. I cannot help but feel resentful, because I feel abandoned. It’s because my father is here but he does not care. He does not support us, especially when it comes to school.”<sup>73</sup> Despite earning more than her father, Isabelle’s mother is still more responsible for nurturing her children. As Isabelle describes: “my mother is the one far away but she is the one who is close. It’s because I think that my father is there physically but he does not care. He does not get involved with us. My mother, even if she is outside the country minds our business.”<sup>74</sup>

As suggested by Isabelle’s family’s case, fathers left behind do far less housework than do migrant fathers, who on average return to the Philippines once a year.<sup>75</sup> Of the twenty-six children of migrant fathers interviewed, most claim that their fathers take over some of the family work of women whenever at home in the Philippines. More often than not, migrant fathers cook, clean, and change their children’s diapers whenever home. In fact, they tend to do more housework than do fathers in “mother-away” families.<sup>76</sup> This is the case perhaps because the masculinity of migrant men is very much left intact and made secure by their financial contributions to the family.<sup>77</sup> As Jessie Bernard notes, the role of the “good-provider” usually overrides other aspects of fathering and singularly determines the masculine identity of men.<sup>78</sup>

Fathers left behind do not completely turn their backs on the needs of their children. Some men do care. For instance, some working-class men have found themselves having to do housework as they are without resources to hire other women or they are left without female kin to help them.<sup>79</sup> In contrast, middle-class men often hire domestic workers.<sup>80</sup>

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73. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 99.

74. *Id.*

75. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Transnational Fathering: Gendered Conflicts, Distant Disciplining and Emotional Gaps*, 34 J. OF ETHNIC & MIGRATION STUD. 1057, 1061 (2008).

76. *Id.* at 1063–64.

77. In other words, the performance of traditional women’s work does not become a primary determinant of a man’s gender identity. This is because masculinity is defined primarily by a man’s status as a breadwinner. See Jessie Bernard, *The Good-Provider Role: Its Rise and Fall*, 36 AM. PSYCHOLOGIST 1, 4 (1981) (“Success in the good-provider role came in time to define masculinity itself.”).

78. *Id.*

79. An example is the case of Lurenzo Lacuesta, who took over the care of his children upon the sudden death of his mother. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 102.

80. *Id.* at 100–01. In my area of study, domestic workers receive on average the equivalent of what is twenty U.S. dollars per month for live-in employment. While there is

Yet, regardless of class, if men do housework, they do not do that much. This was the opinion of the thirty children of migrant mothers who participated in the study.<sup>81</sup> Among the children of migrant mothers who participated, the fathers of only four participants did a high level of women's work such as cleaning and cooking for the family. These four include both middle-class and working-class men. Unlike other fathers left behind, these four men did the work traditionally relegated to women in the household every day. One can only speculate on why these four particular men did housework. I noticed that these four men shared certain characteristics that seem to secure their masculine identity. First, they all had a concrete-structure house built for their families prior to the migration of their wives. Even members of poorer families, who utilized government-subsidized housing projects to obtain a home, had a concrete structure. This suggests that their masculine responsibility as the *haligi ng tahanan*—pillar of the home—has already been achieved.<sup>82</sup> Second, these men all carry a gun at work. If not in the military, they are police officers or licensed security guards. This suggests that men are less likely to hesitate over washing the plates after dinner when they hold jobs that are not only dominated by men but also ones that allow them to project the masculine attributes of authority, control, and power. Following Jessie Bernard's argument, one primary factor determines masculinity: material provision for the family.<sup>83</sup> It seems that the situation of these four men fits Bernard's argument that their masculine identities are not threatened by their performance of women's household chores because their masculine identities are

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no official source for this figure, this was the prevailing wage in the informal economy of domestic work during the time of my research.

81. Although I refer to them as children, they are in fact young adults who can make observations about the day-to-day activities in their households. In our interviews, I had not asked them the leading question "Does your father do housework?" Instead, I asked them to describe the day-to-day activities in their households, such as who cooks breakfast, lunch, and dinner; who picked them up from school as a child; who they turned to for advice about everyday problems; what they talked about with their mother or father; etc. My interviews were not structured but instead open-ended. Hence, I did not ask the children—young adults who are children of migrant mothers—the same precise questions, but they are questions that prompted them to describe the household division of labor in their family.

82. Cf. Asis et al., *supra* note 17, at 199 (writing that women, in contrast, are the "light of the home").

83. See generally Bernard, *supra* note 77 (describing the traditional man's role as the "good-provider" in the family).

bolstered by their fulfillment of the traditional role of being the *haliging tahanan*, pillar of the home, in the Philippines.<sup>84</sup>

Men avoid the expansion of their gender boundaries in other ways. As noted earlier, fathers tend to disappear from the area after their wives migrate.<sup>85</sup> They relocate to another area of the Philippines and thus avoid the possibility that women's work will comprise their daily routines.<sup>86</sup> This trend made fathers relatively inaccessible to interview. More than half of the children in my sample whose migrant fathers are still involved in their lives indicated that their fathers work elsewhere in the Philippines. By relocating, men resist the reconstitution of gender instigated by women's migration. They resist perhaps because they still insist upon essentialist notions of gender.

According to one of the three fathers I interviewed, men discipline and women care.<sup>87</sup> Carmelo Ledesma, a retired military officer and father of two whose wife works as a nurse in Saudi Arabia, explains:

The role of the father is to discipline the child. Right? . . . While the father also is the one who will provide for the financial needs of the family, then the mother takes care of their emotional needs. That is why it is good that their mother always calls them. She gives them guidance, and she does this even if it is very expensive to talk on the telephone. But it is very important for my sons to hear from their mother, to get advice from her, or just even hear her voice. This is necessary to uplift them.<sup>88</sup>

In Carmelo Ledesma's household, his wife is still assigned the work of emotionally caring for their children.<sup>89</sup>

When I asked Carmelo to describe how he feels about his wife's contribution as a breadwinner, without hesitation he claimed not to mind her greater earnings as long as she recognizes his position as the head of the household, meaning he maintains his position as the primary decision maker in the family. As he states, "I am fine with

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84. See, e.g., Asis et al., *supra* note 17, at 207 (describing husbands who, despite taking on domestic work in their migrant wives' absence, still consider themselves the head of the family).

85. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 101.

86. *Id.*

87. I met with other fathers left behind, but they had not been a guardian of one of the sixty-nine young adult children who constitute my primary data. Instead, they were members of community organizations that work with migrant families.

88. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 101 (ellipsis in original).

89. See *id.*

that matter. This is because my wife is submissive. . . . I mean, it is not always me who makes decisions. We often reach an agreement. But if we do not agree, then . . . it is my decision.”<sup>90</sup>

It seems Carmelo Ledesma’s marriage has yet to undergo a major change in gender ideology despite the fact that his migrant wife is the breadwinner in their marriage. Carmelo is still the head of the household. Carmelo cooks, cleans, and does more housework than do other fathers of the children in my sample, but he still refuses to expand his definition of father to include acts of nurturing. As Carmelo’s son Benjamin, a twenty-year-old college student who lived with his brother and father in a comfortable middle-class neighborhood tells me, Carmelo runs their household as if it were a “barracks,” treating his sons like “soldiers” in boot camp.<sup>91</sup> As a military officer, Carmelo acts with authority and his sons know that they must obey him. Carmelo makes “intensive disciplining” part of the daily routine of his household, asserting his masculinity and rejecting any inkling that he could possibly nurture in place of his migrant wife.

By noting the minimal household work of the men left behind by migrant women in the Philippines, this Article does not mean to suggest that the migration of women has not spurred some reconstitution in the gender division of household labor. In some instances, men cannot avoid housework upon the migration of their wives. This was the case for one father, Lurenzo Lacuesta, who had to be his children’s primary caretaker upon the sudden death of his mother. Prior to her death, she had been responsible for the care of Lurenzo’s two children while their mother worked in Israel. Although he found himself taking on domestic responsibilities, Lurenzo still does not think he is doing women’s work. Instead, he considers the work he does to be an extension of his previous duties in the military. As he told me: “This is just the skills I learned during my military training as a soldier. I was trained to do this work as a soldier.”<sup>92</sup>

As suggested by Lurenzo’s case, men in the absence of women cannot always avoid female-gendered care work. These are usually mundane tasks often overlooked but the performance of which have far-reaching gender implications. They include grocery shopping, attending meetings at school, and doing various activities in public with their children, such as walking them to school. These activities

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90. *Id.* at 101–02 (ellipses in original).

91. *Id.* at 102.

92. *Id.*

underscore and make visible mothers' absences from the country. Although men seem to resist the changes forced by the institutional rearrangement of their households, they have sometimes found themselves with no other choice but to adjust accordingly.<sup>93</sup> This fact leaves a glimmer of hope that transformations in gender ideologies could eventually follow suit in the transnational families of migrant mothers.

*B. Overextended Kin*

In the United States, numerous studies have repeatedly concluded that men's household participation has only slightly improved over the years, despite the remarkable increase in the rate of women's paid employment.<sup>94</sup> Likewise, the dramatic departure of mothers from the Philippines has not significantly increased men's household work in transnational families. Examining dual-wage earning couples in the United States using the National Survey of Families and Households from 1986 to 1987, sociologist Harriet Presser identifies the maintenance of different work schedules as a solution and advantage for women.<sup>95</sup> She noted that the absence of women from the home usually forces male partners to increase their share of household work.<sup>96</sup> As Presser observed, "The more hours husbands are not employed during times when wives are employed, the more likely husbands are to do housework that is traditionally done by females, breaking traditional gender expectations."<sup>97</sup>

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93. See PINGOL, *supra* note 69, at 34–36 (recounting stories of men who adapted to their wives' absences by taking over traditional women's work).

94. See MARJORIE DEVAULT, FEEDING THE FAMILY: THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF CARING AS GENDERED WORK 15–17 (1991) ("Women are still expected to take primary responsibility for the caring part of family life, and the social discourse continues to emphasize a model of family life that assumes and builds upon a gender-based division of labor."); PAMELA STONE, OPTING OUT? WHY WOMEN REALLY QUIT CAREERS AND HEAD HOME 64 (2007) ("Women and men closed the family work gap a little, for example, but this was primarily because employed women did much less, not because their husbands did much more . . . ."); Harriett B. Presser, *Employment Schedules Among Dual-Earner Spouses and the Division of Household Labor by Gender*, 59 AM. SOC. REV. 348, 349 (1994) ("Husbands' participation in household tasks has increased only slightly over the years, despite a dramatic rise in employment outside the home among married women." (citing Shelley Coverman & Joseph F. Sheley, *Change in Men's Housework and Child-Care Time: 1965–1975*, 48 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 413 (1986) and John Robinson, *Who's Doing the Housework? The Household Products and Services Market*, AM. DEMOGRAPHICS, Dec. 1988, at 24)).

95. See generally Presser, *supra* note 94 ("[M]odest increases in husbands' participation in household labor may result from the growing diversity in employment schedules among American workers.").

96. *Id.* at 362.

97. *Id.*

Presser's findings support Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration, which argues that structural constraints potentially disable practices so as to prompt social transformations.<sup>98</sup> Following Giddens's theory of structuration, the migration of women from the Philippines and the physical disappearance of a huge number of mothers from the home should initiate social transformations in the family as was the case with the similar circumstances found in Presser's study. However, this has not occurred in the Philippines because other women cushion men from taking on more household responsibilities.<sup>99</sup> The female extended kin who free men of housework and children are eldest daughters, aunts, and grandmothers, who often feel the cultural pressure of providing.<sup>100</sup>

The care work of female extended kin is exemplified in the linguistic references by children to them as "mothers." Grandmothers and aunts were often referred to as "mother" by the children under their care.<sup>101</sup> By referring to female extended kin as "mothers," children recognize the extensive care work provided by their female relatives. After all, neither aunts nor grandmothers in the Philippines are customarily referred to as a "mother."<sup>102</sup> Using this linguistic reference acknowledges and credits female extended kin for their maternal work by name and title. As one child told me, "I do not refer to my auntie as 'auntie', but instead I call her 'mama' and my mother I call her '*mamang*' [mother]."<sup>103</sup> Notably, the efforts of surrogate fathers in "father-away" families to provide care in lieu of the absence of migrant men do not come close to the efforts of female

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98. According to Anthony Giddens, practices constitute structures but structures impose social rules and orders that shape the contours of practices. See generally ANTHONY GIDDENS, *THE CONSTITUTION OF SOCIETY: OUTLINE OF THE THEORY OF STRUCTURATION* (1984) (introducing the theory of structuration, which posits that human action occurs according to a pre-existing social structure separate and independent of other social structures); ANTHONY GIDDENS, *MODERNITY AND SELF-IDENTITY: SELF AND SOCIETY IN THE LATE MODERN AGE* (1991) (tracing and defining the "emergence of new mechanisms of self-identification"). For examples of structuration perspectives in gender analyses, see generally R.W. CONNELL, *MASCULINITIES* 71 (2d ed. 1995); BARBARA J. RISMAN, *GENDER VERTIGO: AMERICAN FAMILIES IN TRANSITION* (1998).

99. For similar findings, see JOANNA DREBY, *DIVIDED BY BORDERS: MEXICAN MIGRANTS AND THEIR CHILDREN* 148 (2010) ("I too find that while men do have a role in Mexican transnational care networks, women are the primary caregivers when mothers migrate.").

100. This was true among female guardians in my study.

101. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 113.

102. In the Philippines, a grandmother is called a "*lola*," an aunt is "*tita*," and a mother is "*nanay*." See PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 113; DAMON L. WOODS, *THE PHILIPPINES: A GLOBAL STUDIES HANDBOOK* 235 (2006).

103. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 113.

kin in “mother-away” families.<sup>104</sup> Thus, among my interviewees, they accordingly have not earned the title of “father” from children in migrant families.

As established in my previous research, the migration of women usually results in the international division of reproductive labor.<sup>105</sup> Women pass down their care responsibilities to less privileged women in a global terrain.<sup>106</sup> However, the international division of reproductive labor does not only free men of household work but also results in tensions and strains among women.<sup>107</sup> Grandmothers and aunts become overextended doing work for which they tend not to receive financial rewards but perform nonetheless out of cultural pressure. This fact reinforces the assertion that the international division of reproductive labor is indeed a relationship of inequality among women and not just one of mutual cooperation against patriarchal constraints. As migrant domestic workers free women employers to pursue more rewarding careers outside the home, women in the Philippines likewise free migrant domestic workers to do the same. Glaringly absent in the passing down of housework among women are men, who, as noted earlier, tend not to reciprocate for women’s greater economic contributions by increasing their childcare duties.<sup>108</sup> This does not come without costs. While women in the middle of the care chain suffer from having to raise their children from a distance, the women at the end of this chain endure the hardship of overwork.

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104. In my study of children of migrant workers, none of the twenty-six households of migrant fathers relied on a surrogate father.

105. See generally Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor*, 14 GENDER & SOC’Y 560 (2000) (documenting the extent to which caretaking responsibilities are distributed internationally).

106. See *id.* at 561 (“This division of labor, which I name the *international transfer of caretaking*, refers to the three-tier transfer of reproductive labor among women in sending and receiving countries of migration. While class-privileged women purchase the low-wage services of migrant Filipina domestic workers, migrant Filipina domestic workers simultaneously purchase the even lower-wage services of poorer women left behind in the Philippines.”).

107. See PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 109–18 (discussing how female kin, including aunts and grandmothers, feel taken advantage of for their added child care responsibilities); PARREÑAS, *supra* note 5, at 76–78 (“Because migrant Filipina domestic workers are usually in the middle of the hierarchical chain of caretaking, they maintain unequal relations with less-privileged women in the Philippines.”).

108. See HOCHSCHILD, *supra* note 70, at 12–13 (dubbing women’s changing role in the household, which is unaccompanied by a similar change in men’s traditional roles, a “stalled revolution” which “lacks men who share the second shift”).

In my study, female kin who do the childcare of mothers often resent this work as an unwanted responsibility.<sup>109</sup> For example, Quirina Belleza, who cares for her brother's children, feels burdened by her responsibilities. Quirina does not receive financial compensation from her sister-in-law in Hong Kong, as she already receives enough from her husband who is a seafarer. Yet, Quirina is still her brother's family's primary caregiver. Her brother, who lives in a remote province away from his children, has left her behind to do the day-to-day nurturing of his family. Quirina gives us a glimpse of the extent of her workload:

Before, I would wonder why I was willing to carry them all on my shoulder. I would ask myself that question. Why do I make all these sacrifices? I would ask that too. I only have one child, and yet I make all these sacrifices. Oh, sometimes I would just be overwhelmed by the work. There would be piles and piles of clothes that I need to sort. I would need to clean after so many people. I have to cook before a certain time. I would cook lunch right before noon. When they all get home, all the food is cooked. My schedule would be, I would take my child to school, then I would go to the market, then I would cook. Then after the food is cooked, I would take food to my child at school. But the food for Phoebe and her siblings would be there waiting for them. I take care of everything. The only thing their mother needs to do is give them an allowance. Then, I take care of all the needs in the households. I do this because I do not want the studies of the children negatively affected, which it could be if they had household responsibilities at home.<sup>110</sup>

Quirina basically runs two transnational households: her own and her brother's. For each household, she prepares meals for each of the children, makes sure the children keep up with their school work, and tucks each child in bed every night. More than the physical task of caring for the daily needs of children, Quirina carries the burden of worrying about their emotional well-being. This worry, she says, is what burdens her a great deal.

Extended kin generally are not altruistic. They tend to accept their added workload with some hesitation. They view the work left behind to them by migrant mothers as a burden and cultural expectation that they have no choice but to fulfill.<sup>111</sup> Unfortunately, this cultural expectation comes to them with strain. Of the thirteen

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109. See PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 112–18; PARREÑAS, *supra* note 17, at 83.

110. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 114 (endnote omitted).

111. See *id.* at 112–18.

female guardians who participated in my study, many are aunts with families of their own or grandmothers who feel they are too old to raise children. Perhaps not surprisingly, most cried during our interview because they felt overextended by the work of caring for the children of migrant parents. This suggests that we should not romanticize extended kinship ties and assume that transnational families arise out of collective family unity.

If resentful, why then do female kin help out the families of migrant mothers? Not all are in need of financial support, suggesting that economics do not always determine their actions. Presumably, cultural expectations of familial cooperation dictate their actions. The guardian of Gailane Tejada, a twenty-three-year-old college student whose parents both work in the United States, explains:

I never really chose to be anyone's guardian. Just that, you know, this responsibility had to fall on my lap because I was here most of the time. And it was like, hey, you know, they are my nieces. I just feel responsible. . . . but it wasn't really my responsibility because I was not their parent.<sup>112</sup>

In general, sentiments of *pakikisama*, or mutual obligation,<sup>113</sup> arising out of the common purpose or interest of a group, which in this case is the family, pressure extended kin to help out migrant mothers.<sup>114</sup>

Female kin in the Philippines help free fathers left behind by their migrant wives of housework. Thus, the presence of female kin stunts the reconstitution of gender relations that might otherwise come about by women's migration. The performance of childcare by female extended kin results then in the maintenance of the ideology of female domesticity. This happens not only because individuals blindly conform to cultural norms. In the transnational families of migrant workers, extended kin, who are usually of the older generation, tend to assert conventional gender norms due to the structural context of their situation. According to family sociologist Scott Coltrane, families embedded in dense kin networks face greater social pressure to conform to gender conventions.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, this is the case in the transnational families of migrant Filipino women as their

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112. *Id.* at 115–16 (ellipsis in original).

113. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 5, at 109; PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 116.

114. *See* PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 112–18.

115. SCOTT COLTRANE, *FAMILY MAN: FATHERHOOD, HOUSEWORK, AND GENDER EQUITY* 146–48 (1996) (“[C]ontact with kin creates pressure to conform to the elders’ more conventional standards.”).

maintenance relies on the kin support of family members left behind in the Philippines.

C. *Feelings of Abandonment and Other Emotional Insecurities Among Children*

This study suggests that children of migrant mothers entertain feelings of abandonment more so than do the children of migrant fathers. This is especially true among the children of married mothers whose husbands do not reciprocate for the economic provisions of their wives or ex-wives. This is also true among the children of single mothers, even if extended kin shower them with love. This Part provides examples of the feelings of abandonment and other emotional insecurities generally articulated by the children of migrant mothers interviewed for my study. These interviews are not meant to support the vilification of migrant mothers in public discourse in the Philippines previously described in this Article.<sup>116</sup> Instead, the interviews demonstrate that it is the vilification of migrant mothers itself—and the consequent message in this vilification that mothers should rightfully be those caring for children—that results in children's feelings of abandonment.

Nineteen-year-old Nilma Loberiza,<sup>117</sup> daughter of a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia, wishes her mother would “come home.”<sup>118</sup> She states this because “[w]e feel as children what it is like to be with our mothers.”<sup>119</sup> Nilma has been apart from her mother for most of her life. Her mother emigrated from the Philippines when Nilma was nine years old to be a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia, leaving three children under the care of a grandmother and aunt. Nilma also lives with her father, but according to Nilma, he does not participate in the daily running of the household. The responsibilities of feeding Nilma and her siblings, helping them with homework, and spending leisure time with them were delegated to her aunt and grandmother. In nine years, her mother only returned to the Philippines twice. Nilma's melancholic sentiments are not due to the abandonment by her mother, whom she talks to at least once a week. Although Nilma recognizes the financial contributions her mother makes to the family,

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116. *See supra* Part II.A.

117. At the time of the interviews, Nilma Loberiza was a nineteen-year-old college student with two older sisters and two older brothers. They grew up under the care of their father, a stay-at-home dad, while their mother worked as a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia.

118. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 125.

119. *Id.*

and acknowledges the security provided by her female relatives, she still idealizes the care and love of her mother.

The longing for greater intimacy by children such as Nilma illustrates what children imagine they would receive if their mothers were to return to the Philippines. Familiarity might be what they desire, but it seems they are longing to be part of a family that follows the normative household model in the Philippines, one that follows the “proper” order of gender.

The normative household model is taught to high school students in the area where I conducted field research. I retrieved the central curriculum for the mandatory Values Formation course for all high school students in the country from the office of the Department of Education in the Philippines. Providing one example, a passage describing a typical family in one available handout distributed to high school students in the area for their “values formation” states:

If we trace back on [*sic*] our history, we are proud to say that we are a strong country. Each family goes to mass together, pray [*sic*] together, ate [*sic*] together, and happily shares stories before going to bed. The father works for the family. The mother takes care of the children. The parents help the children with their studies. They have enough time to talk to their children on their problems. In return the children showed their love by sharing, helping in the household chores. They love their parents so much that they give them their full respect. They never do things to hurt their parents. They consult their parents before doing anything. . . . Because of this, the children are not influenced by bad friends or peers.<sup>120</sup>

The text suggests that non-nuclear households such as those of single parents and transnational migrants cannot provide children with the experience and strength they need to reject negative outside influences.

Those who subscribe to the normative household model presented in the Values Formation courses taught at high schools in the vicinity of this study would consider transnational families to fall outside the norm. Indeed, this had been the case among the children of migrant mothers participating in my study. As Rocil Relocio, a twenty-three-year-old medical student whose mother migrated to the United Kingdom when he was not yet ten years old states,

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120. See PARREÑAS, *supra* note 18, at 51–52 (ellipsis in original) (quoting a Values Formation course handout).

I have a lot of problems. Like sometimes, especially when you are still young, you need to have your parents around, right? You know that it's different. You see that other kids are growing up with their parents. You often wonder how it would feel like to have your mother by your side. . . . I need her. You just know it's different. She's not there and all I can do is write to her or call her.<sup>121</sup>

When expressing a desire to reunite with migrant mothers, children often evoke a desire to be part of a nuclear household, one that is idealized in their Values Formation classes.

In my study, none of the children of migrant fathers described their relationship with their father as one of abandonment. In contrast, many children of migrant mothers did so. Feelings of abandonment do not emerge in a vacuum. Although both children of migrant fathers and migrant mothers spend time apart from their parents, the children of migrant mothers are more likely to feel abandoned because of gender expectations of mothers in the Philippines. From the perspective of the children interviewed, fathers can establish their love and support simply by sending monthly remittances and interspersing them with customary telephone calls. In contrast, mothers must maintain the most intimate involvement in their lives.

These different standards of care expectations result in the designation of more emotional work on migrant women, who must make more of a concerted effort to demonstrate their love to their children with constant acts of nurturing. However, the expectations of nurturing placed on migrant mothers are difficult for them to meet such that even the most cared for children remain disgruntled over what they perceive to be insufficient care. This was the case with Rudy Montoya, the nineteen-year-old college student whose single mother works in Hong Kong. During our interview, Rudy recognized his mother's love, one that she demonstrates via financial remittances. As he told me:

As I was growing up, I realized that she is the best, that I would never replace her for anyone. I realized that if she did not work abroad, I would have no hope for my life. She sent me to school. She makes sure that all of my needs are taken care of. She really wants to satisfy all of my needs. She really gives me everything, and tries to fulfill all my needs and make me happy. And it is really important to her that I complete my education.

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121. *Id.* at 126 (ellipsis in original).

That is what she tells me over and over again, how important it is that I study, that she works in Hong Kong for my sake. She tells me that all the time.<sup>122</sup>

Despite recognizing the economic support of his mother, Rudy still thinks that he was abandoned by her. As he states,

Before I had told you that my mother really loves me, yet you could say that my mother abandoned me, because it is just right that she is the person with you as you are growing up. She is the person who should scold you. She is the person who should give you advice.<sup>123</sup>

Rudy's sentiments are undoubtedly gendered and shaped by traditional notions of mothering in the Philippines. They illustrate that children such as Rudy resist the redefinition of mothering facilitated by women's migration as they instead staunchly hold onto the idea that mothers are the *ilaw ng tahanan*—light of the home. Rudy's case suggests that migrant women's efforts to be the breadwinners of the family have not always eased their responsibilities to be the nurturers of children. Children still view their mothers, regardless of income contribution to the family, as the proper caregivers.

#### CONCLUSION

A resistance against the reconstitution of the gender division of labor in the family is currently taking place in the Philippines and is a response to the migration of women. This resistance adversely affects the welfare of children. It results in greater feelings of neglect among children simply because they do not receive care conventionally. The care provided by mothers from a distance and given by extended female kin up-close is perceived as "not enough." Moreover, this resistance facilitates men's rejection of care work, which in turn aggravates the difficulties that children do face when their mothers migrate.

The family is not a static institution. As Judith Stacey notes, this is the age of the postmodern family, in which economic realities can no longer sustain a dominant household structure, but which has ushered the formation of multiple household forms including single-

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122. *Id.* at 128.

123. *Id.*

parent and dual-wage earning households.<sup>124</sup> To the diversity of household forms noted by Stacey, this Article adds transnational migrant households.

Children do not necessarily receive optimal care in conventional nuclear households. It is common knowledge that problems such as child abuse occur in various types of households.<sup>125</sup> Still, in the Philippines, the notion that mothers should nurture their children up-close retains its ideological stronghold. This ideology does not ease feelings of emotional insecurity triggered by the absence of migrant mothers. What can be done to ease the emotional difficulties that children face from having to grow up apart from their mothers? Perhaps the Philippines should invest in the development of family values courses that recognize transnational families, dismantle the ideology of women's domesticity, and promote the view that fathers can adequately nurture children. These three actions would encourage the acceptance of the unconventional ways that care is provided in the transnational families of migrant mothers.

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124. See JUDITH STACEY, *IN THE NAME OF THE FAMILY: RETHINKING FAMILY VALUES IN THE POSTMODERN AGE* 36–37 (1996) (arguing that the heterosexual, dual-wage earner family has come close to “replacing the modern family as a new cultural and statistical norm”).

125. See, e.g., MARGARET ABRAHAM, *SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE: MARITAL VIOLENCE AMONG SOUTH ASIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES* 1–16 (2000); John Demos, *Child Abuse in Context: An Historian's Perspective*, in *FAMILIES IN THE U.S.: KINSHIP AND DOMESTIC POLITICS* 651, 651 (Karen V. Hansen & Anita Ilta Garey eds., 1998).

