

# DISRUPTIONS, DISLOCATIONS, AND INEQUALITIES: TRANSNATIONAL LATINO/A FAMILIES SURVIVING THE GLOBAL ECONOMY\*

LEAH SCHMALZBAUER\*\*

*This Article draws on field research with Honduran and Mexican transnational families and the transnational family literature to explore how global inequality is influencing gender and class relations within poor migrant families. This Article begins with an overview of the relationship between globalization, Latino/a migration, and transnational family formation. The Article then details and analyzes the intersections of transnational care arrangements and the gendered and classed experiences of individual transnational family members. This Article argues that global inequality, specifically the wage gap between the Global North and the Global South, has direct implications for inequalities within Latino/a families. Finally, this Article suggests that transnational families are resilient, and yet gender expectations and the economic crisis have spawned new gender, generational, and class inequalities that could potentially threaten family well-being.*

INTRODUCTION .....	1858
I. GLOBALIZATION, MIGRATION, AND TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY FORMATION .....	1860
II. SHIFTING CARE ARRANGEMENTS WITHIN LATINO/A TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES .....	1864
III. SHIFTING GENDER AND CLASS RELATIONS WITHIN LATINO/A TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES.....	1868

---

\* © 2010 Leah Schmalzbauer.

\*\* Leah Schmalzbauer is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Montana State University. She has an M.Sc. in Social Policy and Development from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a Ph.D. in Sociology from Boston College. She wishes to thank Steve Bruner, Sara Rushing, Linda Young, Bethany Letiecq, and the editors of the North Carolina Law Review for their helpful feedback on versions of this Article. This Article draws on research supported by the American Sociological Association Fund for the Advancement of the Discipline, a Montana State University Scholarship and Creativity Award, and the National Institute of Health Montana INBRE Program.

A. <i>Gender Inequalities</i> .....	1868
B. <i>Class Inequalities</i> .....	1872
IV. GLOBALIZATION’S CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY WELL-BEING .....	1875
CONCLUSION.....	1879

#### INTRODUCTION

The growing income inequality between the Global North<sup>1</sup> and the Global South<sup>2</sup> has spawned a global hierarchy of families. On the top of this hierarchy are families with the human, economic, and social capital to live and work securely where they choose. On the bottom are families who must continuously uproot themselves and reorganize their labor to secure survival and to attain a chance at upward mobility. Many poor Latino/a families find themselves struggling on the bottom of this hierarchy. In an effort to achieve family well-being, these Latino/a families are forced to uproot themselves geographically, culturally, and economically. Yet, it is apparent that these patterns of migration have disrupted traditional family structures and practices. In the process of migration, relations of power within Latino/a families shift. Indeed, the ways in which individual family members experience globalization are not uniform. They are influenced by gender,<sup>3</sup> which is connected to shifting class and generational relations within migrant families.<sup>4</sup>

---

1. The term Global North encompasses the United States, Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, acknowledging that there are class stratifications within each country.

2. The term Global South encompasses the countries of South America, Africa, and South and Southeast Asia, acknowledging that there are class stratifications within each country.

3. See generally Joanna Dreby, *Honor and Virtue: Mexican Parenting in the Transnational Context*, 20 GENDER & SOC’Y 32 (2006) (discussing the differences in emotional responses of Mexican transnational mothers and fathers and gender ideology); Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Long Distance Intimacy: Class, Gender and Intergenerational Relations Between Mothers and Children in Filipino Transnational Families*, 5 GLOBAL NETWORKS 317 (2005) [hereinafter Parreñas, *Long Distance Intimacy*] (discussing the global migration of Filipino families and the effect of inequality on communications between women and the children left behind); Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Transnational Fathering: Gendered Conflicts, Distant Disciplining and Emotional Gaps*, 34 J. ETHNIC & MIGRATION STUD. 1057 (2008) (discussing the effect gender has on the transnational families of migrant Filipino men and the conflicts engendered by “fathering from a distance”).

4. See generally Jørgen Carling, *The Human Dynamics of Migrant Transnationalism*, 31 ETHNIC & RACIAL STUD. 1452 (2008) (discussing the dynamics of transnational relationships between migrant and non-migrant individuals); Leah Schmalzbauer, *Family Divided: The Class Formation of Honduran Transnational Families*, 8 GLOBAL NETWORKS 329 (2008) (discussing the effect that separation and economic remittances

While the media, policy makers, and academics have focused much attention on globalization's macro structures and processes, much less attention has been paid to what Isaksen et al. call, "the backstage of globalization."<sup>5</sup> Here is where the daily life impacts of globalization are felt; where individuals, families, and communities respond to the disruptions and dislocations implicit in contemporary globalization. More and more, family and community responses to global inequality, specifically to the intensifying wage gap between the Global North and the Global South, have included the migration of family members with the highest income earning capacity from the South to the North; increasingly, these migrants are women.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, transnationalizing family labor, by dividing it across national borders, has become a common survival strategy.<sup>7</sup>

In Latin America, migration most commonly leads to the United States, where low-wage migrant labor is in demand and there exist long-standing and sophisticated networks to facilitate migrant life.<sup>8</sup> On international migration's backstage, dramatic shifts are occurring in Latino/a family structures, processes, and relations. Family separation,<sup>9</sup> transference of care responsibilities,<sup>10</sup> and changes in individual opportunity structures and social statuses<sup>11</sup> are but a few of these shifts.

In light of these changes in Latino/a family structure, this Article will explore both the role of shifting care arrangements within poor

have on class formation between children in Honduras and their immigrant parents in the United States).

5. Lise Widding Isaksen et al., *Global Care Crisis: A Problem of Capital, Care Chain, or Commons?*, 52 AM. BEHAV. SCIENTIST 405, 419 (2008).

6. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Love and Gold*, in GLOBAL WOMAN: NANNIES, MAIDS, AND SEX WORKERS IN THE NEW ECONOMY 15, 18–19 (Barbara Ehrenreich & Arlie Russell Hochschild eds., 2002); Douglas S. Massey, *International Migration in a Globalizing Economy*, in GREAT DECISIONS 41, 47–48 (Karen M. Rohan ed., 2007).

7. Hochschild, *supra* note 6, at 18–19.

8. Sylvia Chant, *Gender and Migration*, in GENDER IN LATIN AMERICA 228, 242–43 (2003).

9. See generally PIERRETTE HONDAGNEU-SOTELO, DOMÉSTICA: IMMIGRANT WORKERS CLEANING AND CARING IN THE SHADOWS OF AFFLUENCE (2001) (discussing the paid domestic work of Latina immigrants in the United States); CECILIA MENJÍVAR, FRAGMENTED TIES: SALVADORAN IMMIGRANT NETWORKS IN AMERICA (2000) (detailing the experience of Salvadoran immigrants and the effects of class, gender, and poverty on the formation of and access to social networks).

10. See Leah Schmalzbauer, *Searching for Wages and Mothering from Afar: The Case of Honduran Transnational Families*, 66 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 1317, 1323 (2004) (detailing interviews with "other-mothers" in Honduras who have taken over mothering roles for absent family members who have migrated to the United States).

11. Patricia R. Pessar & Sarah J. Mahler, *Transnational Migration: Bringing Gender In*, 37 INT'L MIGRATION REV. 812, 816–18 (2003).

Latino/a transnational families and how that role relates to inequality and family well-being. This Article draws from the transnational family literature, as well as from field research conducted with Honduran transnational families between 2000 and 2005, both in the United States and Honduras, and with Mexican transnational families in the United States between 2006 and 2009. The Article looks specifically at how shifts in care arrangements influence gender, class, and generational relations within transnational families. Part I begins with an overview of the relationship between globalization, Latino/a migration, and transnational family formation. Part II then details and analyzes the functioning of care arrangements within Latino/a transnational families, followed by a discussion in Part III of how shifting family structures influence social relations amongst members. Part IV argues that Latino/a transnational families demonstrate resiliency, and yet gender expectations and global economic inequality have spawned new generational, gender, and class inequalities that could potentially threaten family well-being.

#### I. GLOBALIZATION, MIGRATION, AND TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY FORMATION

There is an intimate relationship between global inequality, international migration, and the restructuring of poor Latino/a families. Namely, increases in global inequality have given rise to increases in migration and subsequent shifts in the care structures of those families affected by international migration.<sup>12</sup> In the current global economy goods flow freely, in large part unhindered by borders or regulation, while the international flow of labor is restricted.<sup>13</sup> Despite these restrictions on labor mobility, the intensifying wage gap between the North and the South and market failures in the South mean people continue to move in large numbers from Latin America, most commonly Mexico and Central America, to the United States in search of economic security.<sup>14</sup> The militarization of the U.S. border, strict immigration policies, and global demands for cheap labor have partnered to make much of this labor migration informal and undocumented, and the journey to the United States difficult and, in many cases, life-threatening.<sup>15</sup> The

---

12. See generally Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 10 (arguing that global economic inequality causes international migration and a need for other family members to take on parenting responsibilities in Honduras).

13. Massey, *supra* note 6, at 44.

14. *Id.* at 47.

15. JACQUELINE MARIA HAGAN, *MIGRATION MIRACLE* 3–4 (2008).

impact on poor families has been profound. This section details the relationship between globalization, Latino/a migration, and the formation of transnational families.

Though migration between Latin America and the United States is long-standing, migrant flows have increased over the past decades as economic crisis and the restructuring of national economies have combined to make life for the poor and working classes more precarious.<sup>16</sup> Economic restructuring in Latin America, as mandated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund—via a set of programs commonly referred to as the “Washington Consensus”—has required the adoption of neoliberal economic policies which favor export-led industrial growth, general deregulation, cuts to public sector and government expenditures, and a general opening of national economies to trade, direct foreign investment, and economic liberalization.<sup>17</sup> Advocates of neoliberalism tout economic restructuring as necessary for poor countries’ growth and successful integration into the global economy.<sup>18</sup> Though neoliberalism has led to overall national economic growth in much of Latin America, poverty and income inequality have persisted.<sup>19</sup> As such, for many of the Latin American poor, neoliberalism has meant the disruption of traditional subsistence strategies, along with increased unemployment and vulnerability. As a response, poor and working class Latin American families have increasingly incorporated regional and international labor migration into their household survival strategies, dividing their productive and reproductive labor across borders.<sup>20</sup>

---

16. Nikki Craske, *Gender, Poverty and Social Movements*, in *GENDER IN LATIN AMERICA*, *supra* note 8, at 46, 46–57.

17. See LOURDES BENERÍA, *GENDER, DEVELOPMENT, AND GLOBALIZATION* 3–6 (2003) (discussing the forces and tone of the Washington Consensus in the last two decades in which capitalism is presented as the driving force of development); PHILIP MCMICHAEL, *DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE* 151 (2008) (detailing the various tenets of the globalization project, per the Washington Consensus); JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ, *GLOBALIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS* *passim* (2002).

18. See generally THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN, *THE WORLD IS FLAT* (2005) (analyzing globalization and discussing free trade policies); David Dollar, *Outward-Oriented Developing Economies Really Do Grow More Rapidly: Evidence from 95 LDCs, 1976–1985*, 40 *ECON. DEV. & CULTURAL CHANGE* 523 (1992) (proposing that the outward orientation of Asian economies resulted in much more rapid economic growth as compared to the inward-oriented production in Latin American and African economies).

19. See BENERÍA, *supra* note 17, at 4–6. See generally ALAIN DE JANVRY ET AL., *AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN LATIN AMERICA: NEW DIRECTIONS AND NEW CHALLENGES* 2 (1997) (analyzing free-market reform in the Latin American agricultural industry and the effect of policy on farmers).

20. Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 10, at 1317.

Free trade policies and production for export have been especially disruptive for poor Latin American families.<sup>21</sup> Touted by the now famous Doha Ministerial Declaration of the World Trade Organization as crucial for development,<sup>22</sup> in reality trade (especially trade in agricultural goods) has led to movements of people from the countryside to the cities as small farmers find they can no longer compete with direct foreign investment in commercial agriculture and the low prices of agricultural imports from the United States. The latter has especially been the case in terms of corn imports into Mexico.<sup>23</sup> These migratory flows are gendered.<sup>24</sup> Because much of the pressure to maintain family survival<sup>25</sup> falls on women, and because of gender shifts in labor demand,<sup>26</sup> women are ever more burdened with

---

21. See, e.g., MCMICHAEL, *supra* note 17, at 169–71 (discussing the elimination of small farmers in Mexico by large U.S. agribusinesses as a result of policy changes pursuant to NAFTA); see also SASKIA SASSEN, *THE MOBILITY OF LABOR AND CAPITAL* 18–23 (1989) (discussing the effects of export manufacturing on the migration and traditional employment structures in developing countries).

22. World Trade Organization, Ministerial Declaration of 14 November 2001, WT/MIN(01)/DEC/1, 41 I.L.M. 746 (2002).

23. See MCMICHAEL, *supra* note 17, at 209 (indicating the displacement of millions of Mexican farmers by corn imports); see also SASSEN, *supra* note 21, at 18–19 (noting the displacement of small farmers by commercial agricultural enterprises).

24. See Chant, *supra* note 8, at 242–43 (discussing the consequences of differential patterns in migration between men and women in Latin America).

25. Economic restructuring in Latin America—particularly decreases in public spending which have withered the social net—has made it more difficult for women to fulfill their traditionally prescribed role in reproductive labor: feeding and caring for their families. Craske, *supra* note 16, at 61; see also BENERÍA, *supra* note 17, at 81–82 (arguing that the “crisis of care” in high-income countries induces women from low-income countries to leave their children behind and migrate for work); Cecilia Menjívar, *The Intersection of Work and Gender: Central American Immigrant Women and Employment in California*, in *GENDER AND U.S. IMMIGRATION* 101, 114–18 (Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo ed., 2003) (discussing the effect that women working outside the home has on division of labor within the household and the often increasing pressure on women).

26. Development economists and sociologists have noted a major shift in the gender demand for labor. Specifically, increased global competition has led to more informal work, with a decline in full-time, permanent employment. This has resulted in lower rates of male labor force participation and an increased demand for female workers. See BENERÍA, *supra* note 17, at 78–83 (analyzing the feminization of labor markets); HELEN I. SAFA, *THE MYTH OF THE MALE BREADWINNER* 1–2 (1995) (summarizing how global economic trends caused a drastic increase in the ratio of women to men in Latin American labor forces); Helen Icken Safa, *Women’s Social Movements in Latin America*, in *WOMEN IN THE LATIN AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS* 227, 230 (Christine E. Bose & Edna Acosta-Belén eds., 1995) (pointing to the increasing demand for female laborers in Latin America); see also Sylvia Chant, *Gender and Employment*, in *GENDER IN LATIN AMERICA*, *supra* note 8, at 194, 194–227 (examining gender differentiation in urban markets). There has also been a feminization of the global economy, marked most importantly by an increase in the care industry. Hochschild, *supra* note 6, at 20.

both care and income earning responsibilities, the latter of which can often only be achieved via migration.<sup>27</sup>

As such, within Latin America, women comprise the bulk of rural-to-urban migrants, leaving their children behind in order to work in urban export-processing zones or the service sector, both of which demonstrate a strong preference for female labor.<sup>28</sup> Due to increased cultural and economic ties between the United States, Mexico, and Central America, and the presence of extensive migrant networks, migration to the United States has become a common next step.<sup>29</sup> Whereas women used to migrate internationally in order to reunite with their male partners, more and more they are migrating internationally for purposes of work, often leaving children behind.<sup>30</sup>

The struggles of economic restructuring in Latin America comprise only half of the formula that leads to the formation of transnational families, and even more specifically to female-headed transnational families. Over the past few decades, the United States has undergone its own restructuring, including a shift from a manufacturing to a service-based economy.<sup>31</sup> Implicit in this restructuring has been the growth in demand for low-skill, low-wage, non-unionized labor. Immigrants have largely filled this demand, which is also gendered. While Latino men typically find work in construction, landscaping, agriculture, and commercial cleaning, Latina women more often find work in the care industry, in which they clean private homes and care for the children of the wealthy.<sup>32</sup> It is not uncommon that middle and upper class professional families—families in which both partners work long hours—depend on low-wage female migrant labor to carry out their basic domestic tasks.<sup>33</sup>

International migrant women thus form essential links of what Arlie Russell Hochschild terms “global care chains.”<sup>34</sup> These are the connections that are formed between people across the globe based

---

27. Saskia Sassen, *Two Stops in Today's New Global Geographies: Shaping Novel Labor Supplies and Employment Regimes*, 52 AM. BEHAV. SCIENTIST 457, 487–88 (2008).

28. Chant, *supra* note 8, at 234.

29. SASKIA SASSEN, GLOBALIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS 43–45 (1998) (discussing the link between foreign investment and emigration to the United States).

30. See STEPHEN CASTLES & MARK J. MILLER, THE AGE OF MIGRATION 8–9 (1993) (noting the “feminisation of migration” and the increasing role women have played in labor migration).

31. SASSEN, *supra* note 21, at 22.

32. HONDAGNEU-SOTELO, *supra* note 9, *passim*.

33. Sassen, *supra* note 27, at 488.

34. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Nanny Chain*, AM. PROSPECT, Jan. 3, 2000, at 32, 33.

on paid and unpaid care work.<sup>35</sup> The implications of these care chains are felt unequally. Whereas global care chains help privileged families in the United States attain work/family balance, they often entail the transnational separation of poor families in Mexico and Central America, as poor mothers leave their own dependents behind to take paid work caring for the dependents of others.<sup>36</sup> As a result of these increasingly extended care chains, traditional care arrangements for transnational Latino/a families are changing in ways described in the next Part.

## II. SHIFTING CARE ARRANGEMENTS WITHIN LATINO/A TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES

Transnational families are families that maintain ties despite being separated between two nation-states.<sup>37</sup> Poor transnational families often survive by dividing their productive (wage) and reproductive (care) labor across borders.<sup>38</sup> These divisions of labor are gendered, as women continue to perform reproductive labor<sup>39</sup> from near and afar, while both women and men provide economic support.<sup>40</sup>

Gendered shifts in migration patterns have been at the core of major transformations within poor Latin American families.<sup>41</sup> This is due in great part to social constructions and practices of motherhood and fatherhood. Hegemonic constructions of motherhood in Latin America, for example, place direct nurturing and care of children at the center of a woman's identity<sup>42</sup> and are linked to morality.<sup>43</sup> Latino

---

35. *Id.*

36. See generally HONDAGNEU-SOTELO, *supra* note 9 (describing private paid domestic work performed by Latina immigrants in the United States).

37. DEBORAH BRYCESON & ULLA VUORELA, *THE TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY* 3 (2002).

38. See generally Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 10 (detailing a two-year study that examined the survival strategies of Honduran transnational families).

39. Reproductive labor refers to all the subsistence care work that maintains a family from day to day. This includes cooking, feeding, cleaning, nurturing, clothing, etc. Feminist economists and sociologists use the term to bring attention to the unpaid work done mostly by women that supports paid productive economic work. See BENERÍA, *supra* note 17, at 43; see also Craske, *supra* note 16, at 61 (arguing that reproductive labor has become more burdensome as a result of economic restructuring).

40. BENERÍA, *supra* note 17, at 43; Craske, *supra* note 16, at 61.

41. Dreby, *supra* note 3, *passim*; Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 10, *passim*.

42. See Sylvia Guendelman et al., *Orientations to Motherhood and Male Partner Support Among Women in Mexico and Mexican-Origin Women in the United States*, 52 SOC. SCI. & MED. 1805, 1808 (2001) (discussing the results of a study of the variation in orientation toward motherhood among Mexican and Mexican American women living in urban and rural areas).

fatherhood, on the other hand, has traditionally been constructed around honor, specifically the honor attained through financial provision.<sup>44</sup> As such, Latino/a children most often identify their mothers as their primary care givers.<sup>45</sup> Rhacel Parreñas's research with transnational Filipino/a families is relevant here. She found that when fathers leave children and other family members, those who stay behind may experience emotional displacement, but little else changes in terms of daily life practices.<sup>46</sup> When mothers migrate, on the other hand, all facets of family life change dramatically.<sup>47</sup> Most notably, family care arrangements undergo radical shifts.<sup>48</sup>

Parents who have to work away from home either for short or long durations must depend on alternative care networks to assist in the raising of their children.<sup>49</sup> In my research in Honduras, I found that, due to gendered constructions of care, it is most often women who take on this responsibility.<sup>50</sup> If a father migrates, it is most common that he leaves his children with his wife or partner.<sup>51</sup> If a mother migrates, it is very rare that a father or other male relative assumes care.<sup>52</sup> Instead, when mothers migrate, they typically leave their children in the care of other female kin, most commonly their own mother, or in other words, their children's maternal grandmother.<sup>53</sup> Grandmothers, or other female kin, thus become the "other-mothers" who care for children when their blood mothers are absent.<sup>54</sup> Mothering in these transnational care networks is not based upon the blood relationship of the child to the caregiver; rather it is in the care itself that mothering finds meaning.<sup>55</sup>

---

43. Dreby, *supra* note 3, at 34–35.

44. *Id.* at 34.

45. *See id.* at 36.

46. Parreñas, *Long Distance Intimacy*, *supra* note 3, at 322.

47. *Id.* at 331.

48. *Id.*

49. *See* Elizabeth M. Aranda, *Global Care Work and Gendered Constraints: The Case of Puerto Rican Transmigrants*, 17 *GENDER & SOC'Y* 609, 616 (2003) (discussing empirical research which examines how gender constrains the global care work of Puerto Rican transnational families); Christine G. T. Ho, *Caribbean Transnationalism as a Gendered Process*, *LATIN AM. PERSP.*, Sept. 1999, at 34, 34 (discussing the effects of emigration on the Caribbean family and how global capitalism has shaped familial relationships); Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 10, at 1320–21 (discussing how parents must rely on extended family members or the community to care for their children at times).

50. Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 10, at 1323.

51. *Id.*

52. *Id.*

53. *Id.*

54. *Id.* at 1320.

55. *Id.*

In addition to being charged with the health and well-being of the children left behind, “other-mothers” play an essential role in maintaining family unity and in easing the emotional hardships suffered by transnational youth who remain in the home country.<sup>56</sup> As an example, Alejandra, a Mexican woman and transnational mother whom I interviewed in Montana in 2009, was able to come to the United States because her own mother took in her three children.<sup>57</sup> She told me that knowing her children are safe and well cared for by someone who shares her values lends her serenity.<sup>58</sup> Alejandra’s mother sends a consistent message to Alejandra’s children that she left because she loves them and wants to give them a better future.<sup>59</sup> This in turn gives the children some peace in their mother’s absence.<sup>60</sup> Alejandra’s mother tends to her children’s basic material and emotional needs to ease the strain of Alejandra’s absence.<sup>61</sup> She is yet another example of an “other-mother” who serves as an unpaid and often overlooked steward of globalization and an essential link in a global care chain.

Though “other-mothers” play a critical role in transnational family survival, as cultural norms dictate, blood mothers are charged with maintaining emotional and physical bonds across great geographic distance.<sup>62</sup> To maintain these ties, migrant mothers often structure their lives so as to be able to provide emotional support and life guidance for their children from afar. Joanna Dreby, for example, found that Mexican transnational mothers’ most important commitment to their children was their expressions of care from a distance.<sup>63</sup> In Honduras, I found that mothers and fathers kept tabs on their children’s relationships and activities via weekly phone calls and letter writing.<sup>64</sup> Whereas mothers typically engaged in emotional care work from a distance, making sure their children were “OK” in all facets of their lives, fathers reported that they *received* emotional support from those they left behind.<sup>65</sup> Like Dreby, I found that

---

56. *See id.* at 1325.

57. Interview with Alejandra, in Bozeman, Mont. (May 25, 2009).

58. *Id.*

59. *Id.*

60. *Id.*

61. *See id.*

62. *See Dreby, supra* note 3, at 34; Parreñas, *Long Distance Intimacy, supra* note 3, at 323.

63. *See, e.g., Dreby, supra* note 3, at 55 (discussing the importance of communication in maintaining emotional ties by Mexican transnational mothers).

64. LEAH SCHMALZBAUER, STRIVING AND SURVIVING: A DAILY LIFE ANALYSIS OF HONDURAN TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES 88–89 (2005).

65. *Id.*

fathers played a more authoritarian role, trying to maintain discipline from afar, especially in terms of their children's education, and focusing their fathering on financial provision through remittances.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to the direct care work performed by "other-mothers" in Mexico and Central America and the emotional care work that mothers do from a distance, transnational families depend on the economic care work that both transnational mothers and fathers do in the United States. In many families in Mexico and Central America, the economic remittances that migrants send home provide their sole source of income.<sup>67</sup> Economic remittances are indeed a critical component of transnational family and community development strategies.<sup>68</sup> Since immigration from Mexico and Central America to the United States began to sharply increase in the 1980s, economic remittances have become a pillar of national and community development as well as family survival.<sup>69</sup> For a few countries in Central America, economic remittances comprise the largest source of foreign exchange and in Mexico remittances are second only to oil.<sup>70</sup>

On the family level, I found that economic remittances typically contribute a subsidy of a few thousand dollars per year to family income.<sup>71</sup> Transnational migrants from Honduras,<sup>72</sup> Mexico,<sup>73</sup> and El Salvador<sup>74</sup> said that their families were better off, at least in the short run, because of the income and material comfort that remittances

66. *Id.* at 60, 66 (detailing a typical phone conversation between a transnational migrant and his family in Honduras); see also Dreby, *supra* note 3, at 56 (discussing how differences in migration patterns and emotional responses in Mexican transnational families are tied to gender ideology). "Migration does not appear to significantly transform notions of Mexican motherhood and fatherhood even though it does change parenting activities. Fathers' relationships with their children are directly related to their ability to honorably fulfill the role of economic provider for the family." *Id.*

67. Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 10, at 1325.

68. SENDING MONEY HOME: HISPANIC REMITTANCES AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT *passim* (Rodolfo O. de la Garza & Briant Lindsay Lowell eds., 2002).

69. *Id.*

70. MENJÍVAR, *supra* note 9, at 99; ROBERT COURTNEY SMITH, MEXICAN NEW YORK: TRANSNATIONAL LIVES OF NEW IMMIGRANTS 49 (2006); see Briant Lindsay Lowell & Rodolfo O. de la Garza, *A New Phase in the Story of Remittances*, in SENDING MONEY HOME: HISPANIC REMITTANCES AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, *supra* note 68, at 3, 3-6; Nikola Spatafora, Int'l Monetary Fund, *Chapter II: Two Current Issues Facing Developing Countries*, 2005 WORLD ECON. OUTLOOK 69, 72.

71. SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, at 60; Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 4, at 336.

72. See Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 4, at 336; Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 10, at 1325-28.

73. See SMITH, *supra* note 70, at 49.

74. MENJÍVAR, *supra* note 9, at 99-100 ("And it was such a commonplace practice to send money home, though the amounts were small and, in many cases, irregular, that even children understood its importance.").

bring. A couple hundred U.S. dollars per month can secure family survival in Honduras.<sup>75</sup> With more support, a family can invest in improving its quality of life in ways that were previously unthinkable. In my research with transnational family members in Honduras, I learned that remittance-receiving families celebrated basic household improvements like tile floors in formerly dirt homes, television sets, flush toilets, appliances, and new cars.<sup>76</sup> Remittances not only provide material benefits, but fund future migrations as well; most poor Latin Americans are unable to afford the expensive trip to the United States without financial help from their families.<sup>77</sup> Remittances are also used to support social mobility, like funding education for children or formal and informal business ventures.<sup>78</sup>

There are gendered differences in remittances. Because migrant men tend to make more money in the United States than migrant women, they also remit more.<sup>79</sup> These trends can be tied to gendered expectations of care. As Dreby concluded, when fathers stop remitting it is often because they can no longer meet their financial responsibilities, whereas mothers will continue remitting, even following a lapse due to job loss, and are less likely to cut ties.<sup>80</sup>

For transnational Latino/a families, parents abroad provide emotional and economic care work for their children, while “other-mothers” provide direct care work. Despite attempts to preserve traditional family structures transnationally, the influences of separation and living abroad ultimately shift gender and class relations. The next Part addresses these shifts.

### III. SHIFTING GENDER AND CLASS RELATIONS WITHIN LATINO/A TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES

#### A. *Gender Inequalities*

Within transnational daily life, geographic position as well as one’s position within the family shape individual experiences. Structural inequalities commonly characterize transnational

---

75. Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 10, at 1327.

76. *Id.*

77. *Id.* at 1327–28.

78. SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, at 61; *see* Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 4, at 336.

79. SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, at 60; *see* Louis DeSipio, *Sending Money Home . . . for Now: Remittances and Immigrant Adaptation in the United States*, in *SENDING MONEY HOME: HISPANIC REMITTANCES AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT*, *supra* note 68, at 157, 176.

80. *See* Dreby, *supra* note 3, at 51–55.

families.<sup>81</sup> These families are sites of negotiation, characterized by diverging and conflicting interests and hierarchies of privilege.<sup>82</sup> Gender is an important axis around which power is negotiated within transnational families.<sup>83</sup>

Gender relations may shift during migration. For example, when men migrate without their wives and children they must take on domestic tasks in the United States, jobs which their wives or daughters performed in their home country.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, gender relations shift when women who stay behind, both mothers and “other-mothers,” take on the role of household head, being the public face of the family and managing household finances, in addition to performing their caretaking role.<sup>85</sup> Yet, other gender roles remain rigidly in place. Namely, in all but exceptional cases, emotional and direct care work and nurturing continue to be done by mothers and “other-mothers,” while economic provision is seen as the dictates of fathers.<sup>86</sup>

Gendered expectations within transnational families greatly shape the well-being of both transnational mothers and fathers. The transnational care work performed by Latina mothers in the United States, for example, can bring with it stress and longing.<sup>87</sup> Traditional constructions of motherhood in the United States and Mexico focus on a mother’s omnipresence and devotion to domesticity,<sup>88</sup> which suggests that to be away from one’s children may prompt not only sadness but guilt. Many transnational mothers whom I have interviewed talked about the responsibility they felt for their

81. See Joanna Dreby, *Children and Power in Mexican Transnational Families*, 69 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 1050, 1051 (2007); Parreñas, *Long Distance Intimacy*, *supra* note 3, at 318.

82. See Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *The Social Construction and Institutionalization of Gender and Race: An Integrative Framework*, in REVISIONING GENDER 3, 5 (Myra Marx Ferree et al. eds., 1999); Pessar & Mahler, *supra* note 11, at 813.

83. Sarah J. Mahler & Patricia R. Pessar, *Gendered Geographies of Power: Analyzing Gender Across Transnational Spaces*, 7 IDENTITIES 441 *passim* (2001).

84. SHERRI GRASMUCK & PATRICIA R. PESSAR, BETWEEN TWO ISLANDS: DOMINICAN INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION 150 (1991); Jason Pribilsky, ‘Aprendemos a Convivir’: *Conjugal Relations, Co-Parenting, and Family Life Among Ecuadorian Transnational Migrants in New York City and the Ecuadorian Andes*, 4 GLOBAL NETWORKS 313, 313 (2004).

85. Pribilsky, *supra* note 84, at 322.

86. SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, at 80–82; Dreby, *supra* note 3, at 54; Parreñas, *Long Distance Intimacy*, *supra* note 3, at 327; Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 10, at 1323.

87. SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, at 68.

88. See Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Social Constructions of Mothering: A Thematic Overview*, in MOTHERING: IDEOLOGY, EXPERIENCE, AND AGENCY 1, 3 (Evelyn Nakano Glenn et al. eds., 1994); Guendelman et al., *supra* note 42, at 1806.

children's well-being, the anxiety they had over their children's health and safety, and how much they were willing to sacrifice personally in an attempt to give their children a better life.<sup>89</sup>

Gendered blaming is common. When accusations are made that children are not being adequately cared for, mothers suffer the guilt of feeling they abandoned their children.<sup>90</sup> Fathers are not immune from parenting struggles.<sup>91</sup> However, children who are left behind tend to resent and criticize their mothers more than they do their fathers, because they see their mothers as ultimately responsible for their care and well-being.<sup>92</sup> In addition to the blame mothers place on themselves, and the blame that their children may place on them, absent mothers are frequently held responsible for many of the social ills befalling youth in Central America and Mexico, such as gang violence and promiscuity.<sup>93</sup> Absolved of blame in common discourse are the global structures of inequality that mandate family separation and facilitate deviance.

In her research with transnational Puerto Rican mothers, Elizabeth Aranda concluded that the only way mothers can alleviate feelings of emotional dislocation was to return home.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately many poor Latina women in the United States, especially undocumented women, do not have the privilege of return.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, they do the best they can to cope.<sup>96</sup> Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, in her classic research on Central American transnational mothers in the United States, found that mothers who worked as domestics often transferred the love and longing they had for their own children to the children for whom they were paid to care.<sup>97</sup> Despite the struggles of being away from their children, transnational mothers endure. Simply put, they miss their children, and yet they know that their absence is the only way to give their children an

---

89. SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, at 65, 68.

90. RHACEL SALAZAR PARREÑAS, *SERVANTS OF GLOBALIZATION: WOMEN, MIGRATION AND DOMESTIC WORK* 120 (2001); Dreby, *supra* note 3, at 52.

91. JASON PRIBILSKY, *LA CHULLA VIDA: GENDER, MIGRATION, AND THE FAMILY IN ANDEAN ECUADOR AND NEW YORK CITY* 268–69 (2007).

92. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 90, at 146; Dreby, *supra* note 81, at 1055.

93. *See, e.g.*, Kristine M. Zentgraf & Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, *Transnational Family Separation: A Framework for Analysis*, Paper Presented at Workshop on Transnational Parenting and Children Left Behind (Nov. 21, 2008) (on file with the North Carolina Law Review).

94. *See* Aranda, *supra* note 49, at 615–17.

95. *See id.*

96. HONDAGNEU-SOTELO, *supra* note 9, *passim*.

97. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo & Ernestine Avila, "I'm Here, but I'm There": *The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood*, 11 *GENDER & SOC'Y* 548, 564 (1997).

opportunity for a better future. As I learned in my research with Honduran and Mexican transnational mothers, despite their suffering, on a whole they believe that separation from their children is worth it, as it is the only way their families can get ahead.<sup>98</sup>

Transnational Latino fathers are less likely than mothers to live up to gender expectations of long-distance commitment, and male abandonment is commonly asserted by women who stay behind.<sup>99</sup> Researchers have found different reasons for and levels of abandonment. Patricia Landolt and Wei Wei Da found in their research with Salvadoran transnational families that in most cases in which men stopped communicating with and sending remittances to their spouses and children, the cause was “malfeasance and infidelity” and not economic difficulties.<sup>100</sup> To the contrary, Dreby found that when Mexican fathers grew distant from their children it was because they could not fulfill their role as provider.<sup>101</sup> Dreby also learned that most transnational fathers actually did stay involved in their children’s lives.<sup>102</sup> Jason Pribilsky found that among Ecuadorian transnational families, while male abandonment occurred, it actually happened much less in reality than one would assume by analyzing what Dreby terms “transnational gossip.”<sup>103</sup> Still, Pribilsky found women’s fear of abandonment to be ever-present and infidelity a persistent temptation and not uncommon practice for Ecuadorian men who were away from their wives.<sup>104</sup> Whatever the actual case may be, deeply entrenched gender norms mentioned above, which characterize care work as the female domain, suggest that men are less likely than women to be socially sanctioned when or if they do lapse in their caretaking responsibilities.

More lenient social expectations do not mean that transnational Latino men and fathers are unaffected by the process of separation and dislocation from their home communities. From the limited research that has been done on transnational Latino fathers, we know

---

98. SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, at 64–65.

99. Patricia Landolt & Wei Wei Da, *The Spatially Ruptured Practices of Migrant Families: A Comparison of Immigrants from El Salvador and the People’s Republic of China*, 53 CURRENT SOC. 625, 642 (2005); *see, e.g.*, Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 10, at 1324.

100. Landolt & Wei, *supra* note 99, at 642.

101. Dreby, *supra* note 3, at 50 (“When fathers grow distant from their children, it is generally because they believe they are unable to fulfill their role as family provider.”).

102. *See id.* (explaining that seasonal migration allows transnational fathers to visit children regularly).

103. Joanna Dreby, *Gender and Transnational Gossip*, 32 QUALITATIVE SOC. 33 *passim* (2009); Pribilsky, *supra* note 84, at 327.

104. *See* Pribilsky, *supra* note 84, at 320–21.

that, like transnational mothers, they suffer, and they are often more self-destructive in their coping strategies. Pribilsky, for example, found that Ecuadorian transnational fathers bemoaned the fact that they often had to get to know their children through photographs while struggling with the loss of patriarchal status that ensues from migration.<sup>105</sup> Alcohol use and infidelity were common among this group of men.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, the majority of Honduran transnational fathers whom I interviewed in Boston, Massachusetts,<sup>107</sup> admitted to struggling with loneliness and depression, and several told me that abusing alcohol and finding women on the streets were typical ways men dealt with distance from loved ones and the inability to live up to prescribed standards of masculinity.<sup>108</sup>

### B. *Class Inequalities*

Gender is but one dimension of transnational family experience. Increasingly scholars are also noting the emergence of class divisions, typically along generational lines.<sup>109</sup> Class inequalities, like gender inequalities, may be heightened by transnational shifts in family structure. Geographic distance between transnational family members can accentuate differences in access to resources, mobility, and decision-making.<sup>110</sup> Those who stay in the home country, for example, are commonly beset with the stress of having their well-being depend on remittances—remittances that may not arrive if the migrating family member loses a job, or in the extreme case, abandons his or her family.<sup>111</sup> Migrating family members who bear the burden of remitting funds to keep the family afloat even when they can barely make ends meet also experience stress.<sup>112</sup> Power must be negotiated within transnational families across gender and generation to determine who has control over remittances and, specifically, where the remittances will be invested.

---

105. *Id.* at 330.

106. *Id.* at 321.

107. See SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, at 69; see also Dreby, *supra* note 3, at 52 (finding evidence of depression and substance abuse among transnational fathers).

108. Similarly, Robert Smith, in his ethnography of a Mexican transnational community, found that young Mexican men, who were not necessarily fathers, sometimes tried to recoup masculinity through participation in gangs. See SMITH, *supra* note 70, at 222–28.

109. See, e.g., Carling, *supra* note 4, at 1456; Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 4, at 330.

110. Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 4, at 331.

111. *Id.*

112. *Id.* at 322.

Whereas remittances support basic family and community survival, they have spurred a dramatic division between those who do and those who do not receive them.<sup>113</sup> Smith, in his research with Mexican transnational migrants, contrasted the “remittance bourgeoisie,” who live comfortably and gain status because of their access to dollars, with the “transnational underclass,” the very poor that have no access to dollars.<sup>114</sup> A similar divide is occurring within transnational families,<sup>115</sup> spawned by unequal access to resources and compounded by consumer culture and transnational imaginations.<sup>116</sup>

Class divisions between migrating parents and the children they leave behind may be intensified by “social remittances”<sup>117</sup>—the ideas, images, and messages which flow between migrants’ home and host societies. Distance between migrants and non-migrants can create gaps in information; even migrants who remain in close contact with non-migrating family members often have limited information about their lives and vice versa.<sup>118</sup> Misunderstandings coupled with resource inequality can raise tensions within transnational families. For example, in my research in Honduras, I found that Honduran teenagers who have one or both parents working in the United States have little knowledge of their parents’ lives.<sup>119</sup> Most assume their parents are doing well, whereas in reality many parents are struggling materially and emotionally.<sup>120</sup> Although poor before their parents’ migration, the majority of teens in my sample identified themselves as middle class because of the improvements in their material conditions and educational opportunities that remittances allowed.<sup>121</sup> This played out in terms of their consumption practices and life expectations, as they took on the role of a new upwardly mobile middle class.<sup>122</sup> Yet, their class mobility proved tenuous, dependent on staying in Honduras and continuing to receive remittances from their parents, many of whom are undocumented and most of whom are poor, therefore lacking both economic and legal security.<sup>123</sup>

---

113. SMITH, *supra* note 70, at 50.

114. *Id.*

115. Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 4, at 332.

116. Carling, *supra* note 4, at 1462; Rachel Silvey, *Consuming the Transnational Family: Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers to Saudi Arabia*, 6 GLOBAL NETWORKS 23, 32 (2006).

117. See PEGGY LEVITT, *THE TRANSNATIONAL VILLAGERS* 54 (2001).

118. Carling, *supra* note 4, at 1464.

119. Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 4, at 337.

120. *Id.*

121. *Id.* at 339.

122. *Id.* at 342.

123. *Id.*

In the United States, Latino/a migrants endure great hardships in order to accumulate a surplus to send to their families.<sup>124</sup> They face the emotional burden of separation from their families and home country, as well as the economic and physical insecurity that comes from working in low-wage jobs that often have terrible working conditions.<sup>125</sup> Many Latino/a migrants live in crowded run-down accommodations and skimp on their own necessities in order to remit dollars to their families back home.<sup>126</sup> This strong commitment to family often means giving up their own chance to save money and live a dignified life in the United States, which in turn intensifies the familial class divide.<sup>127</sup>

Gender expectations of transnational parents can accentuate familial class divisions as parents may seek to use remittances as a means of living up to their prescribed roles as mothers and fathers. For transnational fathers, remittances may boost their status as providers, whereas for transnational mothers remittances may be a way to assuage the guilt of not being with their children.<sup>128</sup> During in-depth interviews I conducted with Honduran transnational teens who had a parent or parents working in the United States and sending remittances, I learned that rarely did parents say “no” when children requested money or consumer items.<sup>129</sup> Parents told me that they try to avoid denying their children anything, as remittances are a way for them to maintain status in the eyes of their children and their communities and, especially, to show love and loyalty to family.<sup>130</sup> The economic crisis, and, specifically, the job losses and wages cuts that have accompanied it, have likely undermined these strategies and increased tension within transnational families.<sup>131</sup>

As transnational parents struggle to maintain status and support for family members left behind, especially for children, families become ever-dependent on transnational divisions of labor and consumption. These divisions, however, may be unsustainable due to the economic and legal vulnerabilities implicit in contemporary globalization.<sup>132</sup>

---

124. SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, at 64; Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 4, at 339.

125. Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 4, at 338.

126. *Id.*; SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, at 61.

127. Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 4, *passim*.

128. PARREÑAS, *supra* note 90, at 123.

129. Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 4, at 339.

130. *Id.*

131. *See id.* at 345. Depending on shifts in the economy, it may not be possible for transnational youth to have the lifestyles to which they have become accustomed. *Id.*

132. *Id.*

#### IV. GLOBALIZATION'S CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY WELL-BEING

While it is certain that growing income inequalities have forced millions of poor and working class families throughout Latin America to reorganize care arrangements and live in separation, it is less certain that these disruptions and dislocations are indicative of family breakdown. Indeed, that millions of Latino/a transnational families maintain a semblance of family across great distances and over years of separation is indicative of family resilience. The story of Latino/a transnational families is a story of individual and family agency as it is exercised amidst tremendous structural constraints. "Under western eyes,"<sup>133</sup> family is all too commonly viewed as centered on marital conjugal bonds and biological ties between parents and children, as compared to extended kin networks common in the Global South and in communities of color in the United States.<sup>134</sup> The restructuring of poor families throughout the Global South, as they try to adapt to the inequalities of the global economy, has revealed the prominence of alternative family forms. As suggested in this Article, extended kin networks, comprised of consanguine relations, particularly between women, children, and kin, are increasingly critical to Latino/a family survival and well-being.

Still, no matter how one defines family, it is one's position on the global economic hierarchy that all too often determines the potential of physically being together and/or enjoying legal and economic security and social support.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, it is one's position within the family that shapes in great part how globalization is experienced backstage on a daily basis.<sup>136</sup> Although families have shown the ability to maintain "family" across time and distance, this does not indicate they are better off apart or, more important, that they would not prefer to be together.<sup>137</sup> In my research, in all but the exceptional, yet

---

133. Chandra Mohanty, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, 30 FEMINIST REV., Autumn 1988, at 61, 61.

134. *Compare id.* (detailing the analytical differences of Western women as opposed to women in the third world), with Patricia Hill Collins, *Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood*, in MOTHERING: IDEOLOGY, EXPERIENCE, AND AGENCY, *supra* note 88, at 45, 47 (providing anecdotes that describe the dynamic in an extended kin network).

135. BRYCESON & VUORELA, *supra* note 37, *passim*; GLOBAL WOMAN: NANNIES, MAIDS, AND SEX WORKERS IN THE NEW ECONOMY *passim* (Barbara Ehrenreich & Arlie Russell Hochschild eds., 2002); SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, *passim*.

136. See Chant, *supra* note 8, at 229 (noting the role an individual serves in a family is a factor in how that individual is affected by globalization).

137. SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, *passim*.

notable, cases in which women had left home because of domestic violence or threats to their personhood, both women and men told me that what they wanted most was for their families to be together.<sup>138</sup>

The agency that poor transnational Latino/a families demonstrate is the agency of survival more often than the agency of choice. As such, it is important that scholars and policy makers recognize family resilience but do not romanticize it. Academic theorizing and the legal and economic decisions that affect the well-being of poor Latino/a transnational families are almost always made by those who sit on the top of the global hierarchy of families—those who will never be faced with the reality of long-term family separation and who can thus distance themselves from the intimate human experiences of immigration and globalization.<sup>139</sup> We must be reflective of our position on this global hierarchy as we ponder what might be done in the situation of economically motivated family separation.

Economic realities and policy mandates, which are part and parcel of globalization, are at the core of long-term family separation. Most recently, economic recession has intensified the struggles of poor families around the globe.<sup>140</sup> For the first time in the United States, we are seeing a decrease in cross-border labor flows from Latin America and an increase in “voluntary” repatriations, as immigrants are among the first to be laid off and dislocated from the job market.<sup>141</sup> This economic context poses many challenges for poor Latino/a families. That there are millions of remittance-sending immigrants in the United States suggests that there are millions of their family members who are relying on these remittances for their livelihoods and that the slow of these economic flows would necessitate dramatic curbs on consumption and savings.<sup>142</sup> This in turn impacts access to basic needs, including food, clothing, and shelter. In addition, it alters the upwardly mobile consumer lifestyles to which

---

138. *Id.*

139. *Id.*

140. Robert Evans, *Recession Adds 6 Percent to Ranks of Global Poor: U.N.*, REUTERS, July 6, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE56502P20090706>.

141. See MIGRATION INFO. SOURCE, MIGRATION POLICY INST., RETURN MIGRATION: CHANGING DIRECTIONS? (2008), <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?ID=707>.

142. Rodolfo O. de la Garza & Manuel Orozco, *Binational Impact of Latino Remittances*, in SENDING MONEY HOME: HISPANIC REMITTANCES AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, *supra* note 68, at 29, 29–37.

some, especially transnational Latino/a youth, have become accustomed.

In 2008 I conducted in-depth follow-up interviews with a small sample of transnational Honduran teenagers whom I had interviewed in 2005 and 2006.<sup>143</sup> Three of the youth had a parent or parents who had been forced to return to Honduras because of job loss.<sup>144</sup> Their families are now scrambling to make ends meet.<sup>145</sup> In all three cases of parent repatriation, the teenagers, educated and ambitious, were struggling with the decision of whether to make the dangerous undocumented journey to the United States, even though they knew it was unlikely that they would be able to find work.<sup>146</sup> The default position was to stay put and try to weather the economic and political storm which had engulfed their country, a storm that has intensified with the coup that took place in Honduras in June of 2009.<sup>147</sup> Neither is an attractive option. Enthusiastically optimistic when I interviewed them in 2005, in 2008 they were anxious and frustrated by their lack of choice and opportunity.<sup>148</sup>

In our current research with Mexican transnational fathers, most of whom are temporary workers in the United States who have been leaving their families for six to nine months at a time to work in construction or agriculture in the Mountain West, my colleague Bethany Letiecq and I have found high levels of stress and anxiety.<sup>149</sup> The reality of losing their jobs and therefore the livelihood on which their families have come to depend causes many to panic.<sup>150</sup> Data from a household survey of Mexican migrants<sup>151</sup> showed that almost half of migrant men, the majority of whom were temporary workers separated from their families, demonstrated signs of clinical depression.<sup>152</sup> Our ethnographic research suggests that high rates of depression and anxiety are linked to men's inability to sustain their

---

143. I conducted interviews with eight Honduran teenagers over the telephone in 2008. I also maintained communications with these teenagers through e-mail for the two years after I interviewed them in person in Honduras.

144. *Id.*

145. *Id.*

146. *Id.*

147. *Id.*

148. *Id.*

149. Leah Schmalzbauer & Bethany Letiecq, Montana State University, Community-Based Methods in Action: Capturing the Mental Health of Rural Latinos, Research Presented at the Western Region COBRE-INBRE Scientific Conference (Sept. 18, 2009).

150. *Id.*

151. *Id.*

152. *Id.*

families and to guarantee family cohesion.<sup>153</sup> Already among the most vulnerable of all migrant workers, they know that they will have the most difficult time re-entering the labor market both in the United States and in Mexico.<sup>154</sup> They also feel the shame of letting down their families.<sup>155</sup>

Partnering the heightened challenges that global economic recession has spurred for Latino/a transnational families are the limitations to geographic and economic mobility prompted by strict immigration policies and the increased militarization of the U.S.-Mexican border.<sup>156</sup> Undocumented Latino/a migrants live in constant fear of deportation.<sup>157</sup> The prevalence of high profile raids in the past few years on work sites in places as diverse as Iowa, Minnesota, and Massachusetts has intensified this fear.<sup>158</sup> Undocumented migrants know that they are always at risk of deportation and that if they are deported, their families will suffer.<sup>159</sup> This impacts their individual emotional well-being as well as their practical ability to maneuver the labor market.<sup>160</sup>

Legal vulnerability also presents a significant barrier to transnational family reunification. Because it is difficult, expensive, and dangerous to cross the border,<sup>161</sup> parents who must migrate without documentation commonly choose not to bring their children with them. And whereas in the past they would have migrated back and forth as their economic situation mandated, they now stay put.<sup>162</sup> This entails lengthier and more emotionally challenging separations, since the choice of safe and temporary return has been eliminated. The undocumented who have had children in the United States, children who are by law citizens at birth, now find themselves at risk

---

153. *Id.*

154. *Id.*

155. *Id.*

156. Charles Hirschman & Douglas Massey, *Places and Peoples: The New American Mosaic*, in *NEW FACES IN NEW PLACES: THE CHANGING GEOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN IMMIGRATION* 1, 6 (Douglas Massey ed., 2008).

157. Leah Schmalzbauer, *Gender on a New Frontier: Mexican Migration in the Rural Mountain West*, 23 *GENDER & SOC'Y* 747, 759 (2009).

158. Yvonne Abraham, *Timeline of the New Bedford Raid*, *BOSTON GLOBE*, Mar. 15, 2007, at A18; Nigel Duara et al., *Claims of ID Fraud Lead to Largest Raid in State History*, *DES MOINES REG.*, May 12, 2008, <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080512/NEWS/80512012/1001>; Kim Nguyen, *Immigration Agents Raid Six Swift Meat Plants*, *USA TODAY*, Dec. 12, 2006, [http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/food/2006-12-12-immigration-swift\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/food/2006-12-12-immigration-swift_x.htm).

159. Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 157, at 759.

160. SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, at 33.

161. HAGAN, *supra* note 15, at 3; see Massey, *supra* note 6, at 46-47.

162. See Massey, *supra* note 6, at 47.

of being deported and leaving children behind in the United States, forming a reverse transnational family of sorts.<sup>163</sup>

Within Latino/a transnational families, the effects of legal and economic insecurity are felt differently. Gender expectations and generational position shape the way insecurity is experienced. Biological mothers, who are charged with the immediate physical and emotional well-being of families, carry a heavy and often invisible burden of maintaining family unity and security.<sup>164</sup> Global inequality has placed them in the unenviable position, in which it is difficult, if not impossible, to meet the prescribed expectations that it is the biological mother who is supposed to be ever-present in their children's lives.<sup>165</sup> In addition, they carry the undue weight of being held responsible for social ills, both individual and community, which, in reality, are structural, and thus not their fault.<sup>166</sup> Men, for their part, struggle to provide for their families in an economy that is their enemy.<sup>167</sup> And when they are unable to fulfill their responsibilities, depression and the temptation to flee their responsibilities nag.<sup>168</sup> The global economic crisis suggests that children who have experienced abrupt interruptions in remittance flows or the repatriation and/or deportation of their parents from the United States have been confronted with the reality of their economic insecurity and will be forced to curb their remittance-dependent lifestyles.<sup>169</sup> This is a lot for youth to shoulder. The future paths of the remittance-receiving generation also demand more scholarly exploration.

#### CONCLUSION

On globalization's backstage, poor Latino/a transnational families are struggling materially as well as emotionally due to the dislocations and insecurities prompted by global inequality. Yes, they are surviving, but their lives are not easy, and their lives promise to become more difficult as economic recession deepens and the legal constraints on labor flows are tightened. How do we bring the backstage reality of globalization, the story of separated and insecure

---

163. *Id.* This new type of transnational family deserves further study.

164. SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, at 89.

165. See Glenn, *supra* note 82, at 3.

166. Zentgraf & Chinchilla, *supra* note 93.

167. See SCHMALZBAUER, *supra* note 64, at 69 (detailing the struggle of transnational fathers who now work in a country where they fall lower on the social hierarchy than they are accustomed).

168. *Id.*; Dreby, *supra* note 3, at 50, 54.

169. Schmalzbauer, *supra* note 4, at 344-45.

families, to the forefront of policy discussions? How do we put a human face, a family face, on analyses of global trade flows, labor markets, and U.S. immigration policy? Suggesting that attention be paid to the human elements of globalization presents a major challenge to deeply entrenched academic arguments for objectivity and rationality. Yet, perhaps the current global crisis has provided a unique opportunity to uncover the human struggles that serve as critical pillars of global capitalism. Further exploration of Latino/a transnational families is a powerful means of doing just that.