

**TRANSNATIONAL PARENTING IN MEXICAN MIGRANT COMMUNITIES:
REDEFINING FATHERHOOD, MOTHERHOOD AND CAREGIVING**

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ABSTRACT: In migrant communities around the globe, more and more families are experiencing prolonged periods of physical separation of parents and children as the former struggle to adequately provide for their offspring. This phenomenon of the separation of production and reproduction has garnered sparse attention from social scientists; in addition, available research focuses on mothers' experiences and viewpoints. This paper analyzes this fluid, two-sided parenting and caregiving arrangement through a transnational and gendered lens in an attempt to understand its social and cultural underpinnings. Developing the case of Mexican migrant communities, it explores the diverse economic, political and familial circumstances that can give rise to such a reorganization of productive and reproductive tasks, both at the local and the global levels.

The tone is neither judgmental nor guided by policymaking decisions; rather, emphasis is placed on telling the stories, dilemmas and justifications of fathers and mothers who make the heart-wrenching decision to travel far from their family in order to fulfill their obligations as household heads. At the same time, it gives voice to the caregivers (often grandmothers, aunts and siblings) who take on the responsibility of being substitute parents, sometimes indefinitely. It delves into the domains of gender and intergenerational relations and poses questions regarding ideals of fatherhood and motherhood as well as the novelty of this parenting arrangement. Finally, it takes into account the viewpoints and life experiences of the children left behind or sent back “in their best interest”.

INTRODUCTION

Aldo is a shy 11-year old who lives with his grandmother and grandfather in an agricultural village of Michoacán, nestled in central-western Mexico. The son of a single mother, since infancy his maternal grandparents have been his *de facto* caregivers and the only parents that he acknowledges. His birth mother left him in the care of her own mother while she worked, first as a strawberry packing plant employee in a nearby city and later at a fast food restaurant on the outskirts of Chicago. In his short lifetime, Aldo has lived in Michoacán, the greater Los Angeles area and suburban Chicago for periods ranging from six months to several years. He has been schooled in all three sites, acquiring fluency in Spanish and basic English skills. He calls his grandmother “Mamá Eloisa” and refuses to live with his biological mother, despite the grandmother’s attempt to reunite the two while on a visit to Chicago.

My purpose in this paper is to tell the story of Aldo and other youngsters like him who are entrusted to alternative caregivers while one or both of their biological parents work in another country. Generally children are left behind in the country of origin when their parents depart, although in other cases U.S.-born offspring are sent back to the home country of their parents. I refer to these arrangements in which childrearing activities belonging to the realm of the production and reproduction of the family are scattered across national borders as *transnational parenting*.¹ Generally agreed upon by at least two adult parties and cast in a discourse of being “in the child’s best interests”, transnational parenting is in fact the outcome of a complicated and slippery set of negotiations and often precarious understandings between parents, designated caregivers and the children themselves. In such a tense setting, mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives are drawn into a maelstrom of emotions, duties and reciprocities that are interwoven with gender and generational hierarchies and ideologies. As I will show, the arrangements are the result

of *faits accomplis* more often than of pacts and do not always consider the children’s preferences or feelings.

My study is divided into two parts: the first is concerned with fleshing out the historical circumstances that have created fertile ground for an expansion of transnational parenthood, with particular reference to the case of Mexican migrant communities. From a gendered perspective, I compare the practice of transnational fatherhood -widespread in such migrant communities since the inception of the Bracero Program in 1942- to the more recent and less common one of transnational motherhood. In the second part I will underline and illustrate the multiple dilemmas and conflicting loyalties that family members experience when they become involved in a transnational parenting arrangement. By taking into account the viewpoints of parents, alternative caregivers and the children themselves, I am able to focus on the intricacies of these understandings and bring out the underlying solidarities as well as tensions. Furthermore, by following several case studies over time, I will point out the contingent and extremely volatile nature of transnational parenting arrangements.

I. TRANSNATIONAL PARENTHOOD IN MEXICAN MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Around the globe working families in the twenty-first century are definitely on the move. In an era of globalization, urbanization, economic restructuring, interethnic strife and improved transportation, their members travel increasingly across geopolitical borders, fleeing persecution and hoping to find better paying jobs or simply any employment. When the travelers are parents, they face the difficult decision of whether to take their children along or entrust them to alternative caregivers, either temporarily or for an extended period². Rather than lump together the absences of one or both parents, I argue that it is essential to distinguish between transnational fatherhood and transnational motherhood for at least two reasons. First, we need to unravel the different yet

overlapping historical circumstances that give rise to these two distinct childcare arrangements. Second, gender ideologies have historically cast each one in a different light; fathers and mothers have accordingly experienced these separations from their offspring and extended families with different degrees of guilt, resignation and remorse mixed with pride, satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment.

In my analysis of transnational parenting, I underline the importance of viewing individual and family decision-making processes within the framework of global political economy: changing labor market conditions, migratory policies, legislation regarding nationality and citizenship, border crossing controls, and other social, political and cultural trends all shape how and why parents resort to leaving children behind or to sending them back home.³ In other words, mothers and fathers do not opt to place their offspring in the care of others as a matter of personal preference or convenience; they do so reluctantly when they feel that it is the only feasible means to adequately provide for their upbringing. In fact, as we will see below, in certain cases labor recruiting practices **force** working mothers or fathers to leave children behind.

This section of my paper is based upon anthropological literature which for the most part does not focus directly on transnational parenting but rather on the intersection of migratory flows, labor market participation and gender issues. From this corpus I have culled fragments relating to transnational parenting practices. I also draw heavily upon my own long-term ethnographic study of changing family dynamics in transnational social fields.⁴ The latter covers three generations of families whose lives straddle several distant yet interconnected sites: an agricultural community in Michoacán that, like so many others throughout Mexico, is highly dependent upon migrant remittances; suburban Chicago neighborhoods; and a string of towns lying in California’s central valley.

Transnational fatherhood

In Mexican villages, towns and cities where male emigration to the U.S. took hold as a way of mitigating failing agricultural revenues and poverty, the prolonged physical absences of migrant fathers from their spouses and offspring were viewed by family members as a necessary evil. Said resignation prevailed for several decades, roughly from the 1940s (with the implementation of the Bracero Program that recruited Mexican male laborers into the U.S. farm and industrial sectors) through the 1980s. In fact, the male household head's decision to try his luck in the north was often not even discussed but rather abruptly announced by the father to the rest of the family. Migration and development specialists dubbed this pattern as the male lone circular or target migrant and paid little attention to the consequences of absentee fatherhood.

The children were “naturally”⁵ left in the care of their mothers who stayed behind in Mexico to ensure their proper upbringing. In some cases, after several years, the father had improved his economic situation and/or obtained legal status, advantages leading him to consider family reunification: he would then “send for” the mother and children to also come north. But for the most part, fathers voiced two justifications for leaving their families behind, one overtly economic and the other clearly cultural. Firstly, fathers argued, given the higher cost of living in the U.S., leaving the rest of the family in Mexico lowered the financial burden of their reproduction, allowing for more effective saving strategies –an especially important consideration for target migrants. Secondly, husband-fathers were (and continue to be) very concerned about the pernicious effects that life in the U.S. might have on their wives and offspring. Their worries include not only inappropriate or inadequate housing and schools; they also extend to acquaintances and circumstances that would place their family members in physical and/or moral danger. In the case of youngsters, gangs, drugs, and behavior showing a lack of respect for elders are foremost concerns;

in the case of wives, husbands fear that -in the long run- advice from female counterparts and government support for women and children undermine male authority and sole breadwinner image.

These extended separations took a heavy toll on fathers and their families. In migrant communities stories abound of fathers returning to Mexico after several years in the North to meet a son or daughter for the first time, only to be rejected by the newest family member as a stranger. Children were taught to respect the father figure who was complying with his role as provider, but they were unable to develop close bonds with him. In the absence of their spouses, wives were forced to assume new responsibilities and transgress certain gendered spaces. For example, many women had to generate income to provide for their children and themselves when remittances were not forthcoming or few and far between.

Referred to as the “paycheck father” phenomenon, since approximately the 1990s male migrant absences have increasingly come under attack by their spouses, priests and their own children, at least retrospectively. Wives complain of the heavy burden they must bear in their roles as both mother and father or as pseudo-widows. They also voice protests to their husbands and other family members; the words of one migrant wife to her spouse summarize a generalized unwillingness to continue to justify male absences: “It makes no sense for us to be separated”. Priests are keenly aware of the tensions and strains placed on marital and parental ties by physical separation and encourage couples to reside together. While children of migrant fathers recognize the sacrifices that their progenitors made to offer them a higher standard of living, they rue the emotional distancing from the father figure that accompanied greater material satisfactions than non-migrants.

These criticisms of the absent father have emerged in the midst of redefinitions of fatherhood and of the ideal paternal figure. For decades a good father was first and foremost an adequate

provider: if he migrated, he sent sufficient remittances regularly. By delegating the upbringing of the children to his wife, he maintained reduced communication with his spouse and children. Today all family members interviewed on this topic (husbands, wives and children), natives of one particular migrant village, confirmed that a good father should send money regularly and not waste it on vices such as alcohol and philandering. But, in addition, he should give sound advice to his children and guide them along the path of life –duties that require physical closeness. In figure 1, I present a diagram of these social representations of transnational fatherhood. The shift that families have molded in gender ideology is that a good migrant father should not only ensure that the anxiously awaited money order reaches his family; he should also be in telephone contact with his wife and children and visit them as often as possible in order to bond with them on an emotional level. Thus, a certain physical presence and closeness have become requirements of fatherhood.

TRANSNATIONAL MOTHERHOOD IN MEXICAN MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Although for decades Mexican migrant fathers have left their children behind to be cared for by their wives, the idea that mothers would place their offspring in the care of others in order to emigrate is somehow considered more shocking and unnatural, even though the principal motive is – as in the case of transnational fatherhood- to better provide for their children. In a pioneer study published in a U.S. feminist journal in 1997, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila placed Latina transnational motherhood⁶ in the framework of political and academic debates on immigrant life in California. Based on interviews with poor, undocumented female migrants from Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala employed as housekeepers and/or nannies in the Los Angeles area, the authors enumerate the factors that force these women to leave their children behind with alternative caregivers and underline the vulnerability, humiliation and ultimately irony of working as domestics

(cleaners and caregivers) for First World women and their children while being unable to care directly for their own offspring. Yet, nonetheless, these domestics have forged new definitions of motherhood, attuned to the gendered and racialized employment demand that precludes living with their children yet affording them a sense of accomplishment, even pride as providers who are financially and emotionally involved in their children’s upbringing despite physical separation. Based on Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila’s argument, in Figure 2 I present a diagram of the transnational motherhood circuit, pointing out the mechanisms through which these mothers remain connected to their offspring, a goal voiced succinctly in the phrase: “I’m here but I’m there”.

Of course social constructions of motherhood are intimately related to those of fatherhood. As we have seen above, the breadwinning/supporter role has long been the mainstay of the fatherly image. As more and more migrant and non-migrant wives/mothers enter into paid work outside the home, the father is no longer the sole support of the family. Yet, the female breadwinning role has been incorporated into the motherly image in a different fashion than in the case of male counterparts: rather than being a centerpiece, providing economically is inextricable from providing emotional and moral guidance. As Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997:562) argue: “Rather than replacing caregiving with breadwinning definitions of motherhood, they appear to be expanding their definitions of motherhood to encompass breadwinning that may require long-term physical separations. For these women, a core belief is that they can best fulfill traditional caregiving responsibilities through income earning in the United States while their children remain ‘back home’”.

Turning now to Mexican migrant communities, transnational motherhood emerges in a variety of circumstances, four of which I have classified in a typology presented in Figure 3. Each case is viewed through a gendered lens, revealing cultural values regarding fatherhood and

motherhood. How each form of motherhood is judged by peers and justified by the parties involved is related to changing social constructions of parental caregiving deeply embedded in gendered and generational hierarchies.

The apparently most common set of circumstances⁷ leads to staggered transnational motherhood (type 1): preceded by transnational fatherhood, the wife/mother is “sent for” by the husband to join him in the destination country. As Woo (2001:55) suggests in her study of Jalisco-born female migrants to Los Angeles in the 1980s, this move is often linked to a legalization strategy. At first blush, this practice is seen as an uncontested male decision since the husband generally orchestrates and finances the trip while the wife obediently follows his instructions without expressing her own opinions. While this subservient attitude was probably the rule for many wives inculcated in the “one must follow the footsteps of one’s man” adage, currently behind-the-scenes negotiations may take place. In fact, the wife may have actually lobbied her spouse to carry out a plan of family reunification.

Furthermore, the husband’s “call” may in fact spark resistance or even open refusal from his wife. The point of contention tends to be precisely a parenting issue: whether or not some, all or none of the children accompany the wife/mother in her journey north. Ironically the process of family reunification often occurs in a staggered fashion with some children being taken along and others left behind, based on age, legal status, schooling and health issues, financial considerations, etc. The woman may feel torn between her two roles: being a wife and being a mother.⁸ The physical separation of siblings for an unknown time period is another concern.

When economic hardship coupled with windows of opportunity for border crossing lead both parents to decide to migrate together; simultaneous transnational fatherhood and motherhood (type 2) occur. Typically families facing a dire economic situation or having set a specific goal (e.g.

building a house) make this joint decision. Once again, one or more of the children may accompany the parents, while others are entrusted to alternative caregivers. Thus, a case of transnational parenting emerges for some of the offspring, but not for all.⁹ Hagan (1994) whose fieldwork in Houston allowed her to delve into the participation of highland Maya male and female migrants from Guatemala in the legalization processes spawned by the 1996 Immigration Reform and Control Act reports cases of simultaneous transnational motherhood and fatherhood. Among this group, mothers and fathers commonly agree to send U.S.-born children “back home” to be raised by grandmothers and other kin for several reasons: 1) to allow the mother to begin or resume full-time employment in the U.S. ; 2) to immerse the youngster in an authentic Maya cultural matrix for the learning of language, dress and similar customs; and 3) to offer companionship to aging grandparents in compensation for the absence of their own children.

When the wife and not the husband is recruited for employment, usually under the auspices of a governmental program that targets married and/or widowed female workers, she generally presents her departure to the spouse as a means of getting ahead, of offering their children a higher standard of living. In other words, in order to obtain the husband’s permission, the wife proposes generating a supplementary income (type 3). For example, Vidal et al. (2002) traced the steps of single and married female migrants from Tabasco in the Gulf of Mexico who travel to North Carolina as seasonal laborers in the crab industry; the latter leave their children and their fishermen husbands behind for roughly seven months of the year. As Smith-Nonini (2002) aptly points out, these trained and experienced women workers -hired under the H2A guestworker program sponsored by the U.S. government- are prohibited from traveling with their families. Canada operates a similar guestworker program (through the federal FARMS agency) requiring that men applicants be married or in common-law unions while women should preferably be single mothers

or widows. Canadian researchers Barndt (2000) and Preibisch (2000) both underscore how this recruitment apparatus contributes to the creation of a docile, vulnerable labor pool which incorporates bodily disciplinary measures, is committed to returning to Mexico and remains grateful for new opportunities of employment in Canada the following season as a reward for good behavior. These are clearly documented instances of hiring and labor force control practices that not only foster but actually enforce transnational motherhood.

In the fourth case of transnational motherhood, when marital problems (leading to separation or divorce) or loss of husband (through death or abandonment) compromise the male source of income, some mothers in migrant communities perceive emigrating or remaining in the U.S. in order to support their children as their best or only option.

II. LOYALTIES, TENSIONS AND STRAINS IN TRANSNATIONAL PARENTHOOD

Having discussed the historical circumstances rooted in political economy that contribute to the emergence and expansion of transnational parenting as well as differences between fatherhood and motherhood, I now turn to an analysis of how these arrangements are actually negotiated among myriad social actors who invoke discourses of gender and generational hierarchies, loyalties and responsibilities. I base my arguments on five case studies of transnational parenthood in which the biological parent(s) is (are) wage-earner(s) in the United States. In order to understand the different viewpoints of the actors involved, several members of the extended family and neighbors were interviewed, when possible over a period of several years. Following the arrangements through time allows me to underscore their fluid and contentious nature, in sharp contrast to more extremist positions that would cast the relatives involved in a good guys versus bad guys framework.

The cases of transnational parenthood that I have encountered in my fieldwork suggest that more often than not the decision is taken by one or both biological parent(s) who then to a certain degree “force(s) the hand” of the alternative caregiver by calling on filial and/or parental loyalties. This creates a situation in which the latter family member(s) find(s) it difficult to refuse assistance. Alternative caregivers tend to narrate the onset of the arrangement in fatalistic terms such as these: given the circumstances, how could I possibly **not** help my kin? What begins as an offer or more often acceptance of temporary aid may become extended indefinitely. Caregivers then become more and more emotionally involved in the child’s upbringing and enter into a network of support that parents weave, a process to which I now turn.

Many mothers: creating a social network for childrearing

In her book Transnational Villagers, Levitt (2001) follows the movements of Dominican couples as they and their offspring shuttle between the home island in the Caribbean and Boston, building a cultural matrix in which “many mothers” are involved in childrearing. For the most part staggered transnational motherhood beginning as early as the 1970s and 1980s, among Dominican migrants we find cases of parents raised by their grandparents who now repeat the pattern of entrusting their own offspring to the next generation of grandparents. This generational perspective allows the author to explore the transnational distribution of production and reproduction tasks, stressing the historical involvement of many kin in childrearing and tracing some long-term consequences of having many mothers. Youngsters may be confused by the lack of a clear figure of authority and by receiving conflicting instructions as to how to behave, yet they may also take advantage of said ambiguity. Biological mothers working in the U.S. must accept the fact that other kin develop closer relationships to their children than they themselves can despite frequent visits, telephone calls, letters, videos and other means of communication.

In five case studies culled from a Mexican migrant community in rural Michoacán, I also found that while one relative may initially be designated caregiver, other family members are eventually recruited to assist the children in other ways. Given matriarchal models of childrearing in Mexico, the grandmother is the first choice for surrogate mother. She and the grandfather are considered the figures of authority in all matters concerning the children entrusted to them. Yet, due to old age, illness or reduced mobility, they are often unable to solve everyday problems and needs of youngsters. Consequently, parents ask aunts (and to a lesser degree uncles) to help with homework, attend school meetings, receive and manage remittances, make doctor visits, etc.

Spinster aunts, especially if they are particularly close to the biological mother, are prime candidates for the support network. Over time, the dividing line between aunt and mother begins to blur. For example, in a case of simultaneous transnational fatherhood and motherhood, Amelia is the spinster aunt who has raised her niece from the time the child -now a fifth grader- was five years old; she reports that her sister recognizes Amelia as the child's **real mother**. The maternal grandfather, himself a migrant to Chicago, has financially provided for his granddaughter since remittances were not forthcoming, chiding his daughter and son-in-law for not meeting their parental commitments. When the sister's marriage recently failed due to the husband's alcoholism and financial irresponsibility, Amelia was summoned to come with her niece to Chicago in order to continue caring for her as well as two younger sisters. Though undecided, Amelia explained that if she did opt to go North with her niece, it would be out of sisterly love, since she prefers to live in Mexico. Yet, she understands the soundness of her sister's arguments: in the U.S. she has a steady job and government support for her baby. Amelia has also discussed with her niece the alternative of bringing the two sisters back to Mexico; the young girl thinks her siblings would miss their mother too much. Clearly, as a result of transnational parenting, the three sisters have embarked on

different life paths: the youngest is U.S.-born while the other two are Mexican citizens, one of whom resides illegally in the U.S. as does her mother. Their different legal statuses would seem to complicate the mother’s goal of reunification in Chicago. Yet another possibility explored by the grandfather was to use his own legal status as a resident alien in the U.S. to obtain papers for his eldest granddaughter to cross the border legally, but this avenue proved unfruitful. The ongoing drama of Amelia’s niece illustrates how family members involved in transnational parenting arrangements invoke gendered and generational loyalties to criticize negligence, mobilize support or justify offering assistance.

Siblings, especially older sisters, may also be recruited as caregivers. In a case of staggered transnational motherhood, fifteen-year-old Ana was given the responsibility of caring for her two younger brothers and sister, all attending school in the village. The mother took the youngest child (then age five) along with her on the illegal journey across the U.S. border. Just out of secondary school herself, Ana had envisioned continuing on with high school, but these plans were postponed in view of her new responsibilities. Although the paternal grandmother had adamantly refused to be in charge of the four youngsters, since she lived next door, the grandchildren were in close contact with her on a daily basis, stopping by for meals, for example. Due to the fact that Ana was under the legal age, a spinster aunt was sent the remittances and served as the children’s official tutor for school matters. This aunt became particularly attached to one of the nephews and “cried as if he were my own son” when he followed in his parents’ and brother’s footsteps and headed north to Chicago. In this second case study, from the oldest daughter’s perspective, she was forced by her mother to assume a heavy responsibility and sacrifice her own educational goals, at least temporarily. Her mother and father reached an agreement and set themselves the goal of improving and expanding the house and they were counting on Ana. After three years went by, she did in fact

go on to complete high school, all the while partially carrying the burden of caring for her siblings. The grandmother also narrates her own participation as having been forced by the circumstances, underscoring the subtle pressure placed upon kin to provide assistance even against their will. Like the three sisters in the previous case study, these five siblings have been placed by their parents on different paths: the most stark contrast is between the four raised in Mexico and the youngest schooled and raised in the presence of his two parents in the U.S.

The overall safety net of many caregivers is therefore not devoid of tensions and strains; fault lines tend to appear with regard to issues of money, authority and adoption. Despite careful accounting for remittances, kin may not see eye to eye on the necessity of making certain expenditures nor on the best future for children placed in their collective care. In some cases, the possibility and/or convenience of adoption by another family member better able to provide for the child than his biological parents begins to be overtly discussed. Said discussions may be hastened by the failing health of grandparents, whose authority also may erode. Once again, in Mexican migrant communities, legal migrant status is a key resource that may be placed at the disposal of kin or denied.

In the case of eleven-year-old Aldo showcased at the beginning of this paper, the youngster has made his preference to remain with his grandparents in Mexico clear, yet his future remains uncertain. As his aging grandmother and ailing grandfather (both in their seventies) have pointed out to him, they may not live until he becomes of legal age. This scenario has raised the issue of possible adoption by an uncle (brother of the biological mother) residing in California who is a naturalized U.S. citizen. The topic continues to spark heated discussion among extended family members. On the one hand, another uncle living in California was adamant in his opposition: “The boy is not a little pig to be given away.” The first uncle’s wife (the only non-blood relative

involved in the decision making process) has stated her conditions for the adoption to take place: neither the grandparents nor the biological mother would have any say in Aldo’s future. This loss of elderly authority seems unfair to other uncles and aunts who point out the one fact that all can agree upon: the grandmother has indeed raised the boy from infancy. For the time being, the agreement reached is that Aldo continue to live with his grandparents until their deaths, at which time he poignantly states: “Then we’ll see who wants me.”

CONCLUSIONS: REDEFINING FATHERHOOD, MOTHERHOOD AND CAREGIVING

In Mexican migrant communities and in others around the globe, transnational parenting arrangements are on the rise. In this study I have attempted to portray these arrangements in a non-judgmental fashion, as the outcome of difficult negotiations and tenuous understandings between members of a kin group: mothers, fathers, designated caregivers and the children themselves, all of whom live in particular historical circumstances at the start of the twenty-first century. The increasing frequency and visibility of transnational parenting is not coincidental; economic hardship and political strife in certain regions coupled with worldwide industrial and agricultural restructuring have spawned certain employment demands and labor recruiting practices that force working parents to leave children behind or send them “back home” .

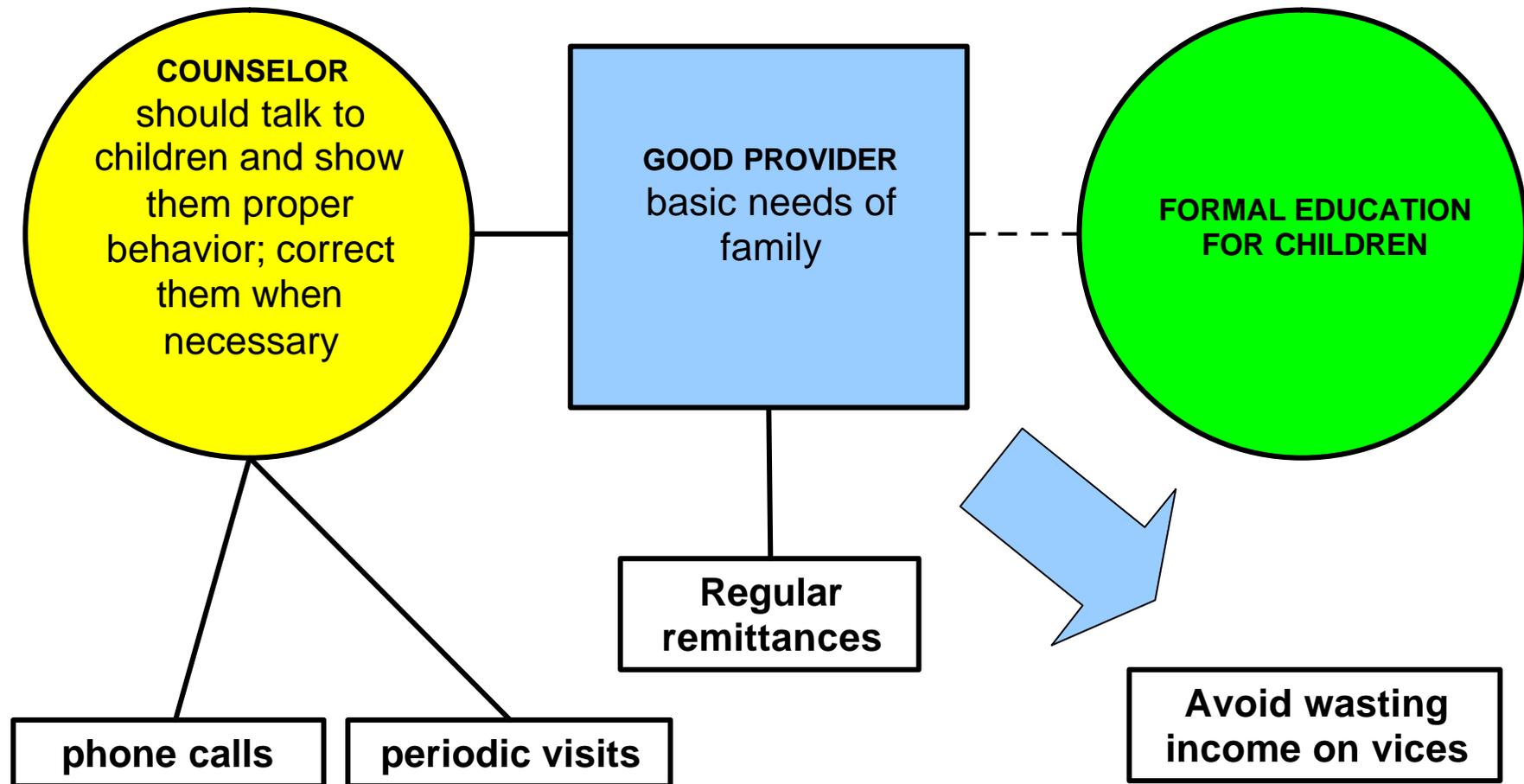
I have argued that transnational fatherhood historically preceded transnational motherhood and that the two practices are linked yet evaluated differently along gendered lines. Gender and generational hierarchies and ideologies crosscut the decision-making processes (at the individual and extended family levels), processes which are molded by trends in global political economy. I hope to have shed some light on the following apparent paradox: a growing number of mothers and

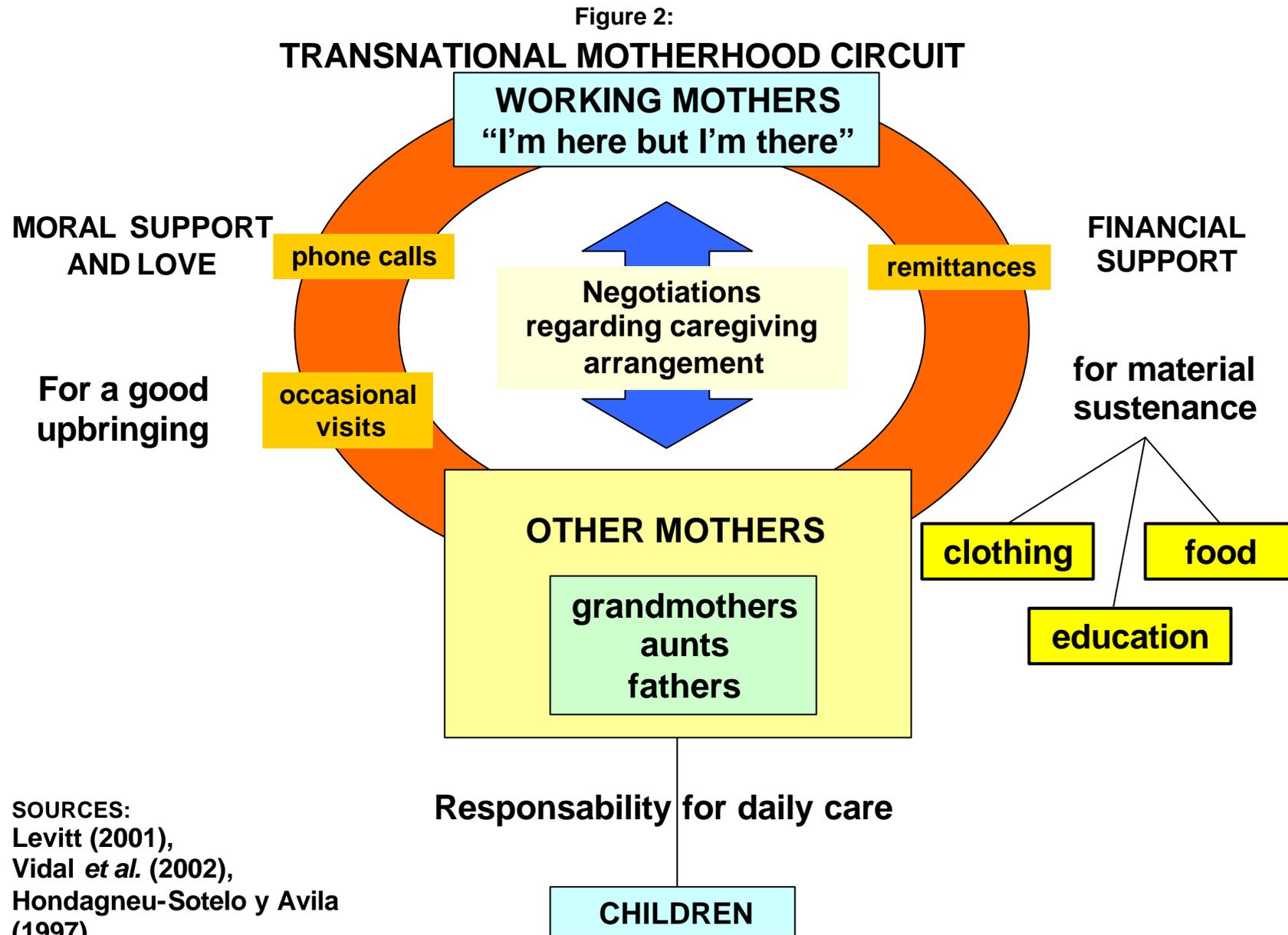
fathers have and continue to endure long-term physical separation from their offspring as a means to better provide for their upbringing.

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Figure 1:
**TRANSNATIONAL FATHERHOOD
SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS**





SOURCES:
Levitt (2001),
Vidal *et al.* (2002),
Hondagneu-Sotelo y Avila
(1997),
Interviews in Michoacán

Figure 3:
CASES OF TRANSNATIONAL MOTHERHOOD

Type	Precipitating circumstances
STAGGERED	WIFE/MOTHER IS “SENT FOR” BY THE HUSBAND TO JOIN HIM IN THE DESTINATION COUNTRY
SIMULTANEOUS	ECONOMIC HARDSHIP COUPLED WITH WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR BORDER CROSSING LEAD BOTH PARENTS TO EMIGRATE TOGETHER
SUPPLEMENTARY TO HUSBAND’S EARNINGS	WIFE/MOTHER SEEKS EMPLOYMENT, USUALLY IN A GOVERNMENTALLY-SPONSORED PROGRAM TARGETING MARRIED FEMALE WORKERS
SUBSTITUTION OF HUSBAND’S EARNINGS	MARITAL PROBLEMS (LEADING TO SEPARATION OR DIVORCE) OR THE LOSS OF THE HUSBAND COMPROMISE THE FAMILY’S INCOME SOURCE.

ENDNOTES

¹ Other authors have coined phrases to refer to the general phenomenon of the family's social reproduction responsibilities spanning borders, but do not focus on the activity of parenting : e.g. a house divided (Cf. López Castro 1984); split or divided households (Cf. Kanaiapuni 2000).

² The children involved range from infants (Hagan 1994: xv, for example, reports on Maya parents in Houston sending a newborn baby to grandparents in Guatemala with friends) to teenagers (Levitt 2001 observed many cases of adolescents sent back from Boston to stay with relatives in the Dominican Republic.)

³ Wilson (2000) makes a cogent case for understanding the current nativist upsurge in the United States as an attempt to enforce a reparation of production and reproduction among Mexican immigrants, leaving the labor force “unencumbered” by family responsibilities and therefore able to be overexploited.

⁴ This study began in 1991 and has involved multisited fieldwork with Mexican migrant and nonmigrant families in the Ecuandureo Valley of northwestern Michoacán, California's Central Valley and suburban Chicago by a team of researchers headed by the author. Data were collected by means of household surveys, archival searches and hundreds of in-depth and open-ended interviews with men and women of different generations. One recent set of interviews –particularly useful for this paper- was designed to elicit descriptions of a good father, mother, daughter and son among natives of the study community and to track changes in these ideal types over time.

⁵ This naturalization is of course linked to the maternal role in reproduction and to the association of the female with home and hearth.

⁶ Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila(1997:550) define transnational motherhood as “the circuits of affection, caring, and financial support that transcend national borders”.

⁷ Although this first case is the most frequently mentioned in studies, it may be misleading. Presumably, female migrants have been uncritically placed in the family reunification mold, since it does not question prevailing gender ideologies.

⁸ In one case in which the migrant husband instructed his wife to leave all but the youngest child behind, the wife refused to go north, not wanting to abandon her children. In retrospect, she rues that decision and blames herself for her husband having started a relationship with another woman in the U.S.

⁹ I will return to this point of siblings embarking on different life paths in the second section of this paper.