

## Research Article

# The Global Care Chain: Analyzing the Increasing Feminization of Care Work Across Borders

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## Abstract

With the rise in globalization, there has been an increase in migration, specifically labor migration. Women migrating to perform care labor has exploded after women formally entered the global labor market. Although many female migrants are independently traveling as the primary breadwinners of their households, they remain underappreciated, invisible, under-waged, and exploited. Upon relocating from countries in the global south to conduct care work in more affluent nations or communities, they leave their dependents behind, ultimately in the care of another female, typically a family member, or yet another more impoverished woman. At this point, the global care chain is not a single, linear chain but rather an intersecting one composed of numerous chains that multiple women become a part of. Therefore these intersections between the public and private, the paid and unpaid, and the productive and reproductive forms of care work are present. In addition, although globalization and neoliberal policy have benefited *some* women globally, it has dramatically made women who migrate for global care work and labor suffer. When women migrate, the global care chain often becomes an entire phenomenon through which many things intersect. On the one hand, we witness capitalism, feminization of migration, globalization, and neoliberalism interacting while also intersecting with care, emotional work, and gender relations. The goal of this paper is to examine and connect the intersectional effects on women by examining global care work in Asia and Latin America. In addition, we ask the following questions: How can we create change so that women's work is no longer invisible? How can we build a society where individuals are esteemed not just on monetized work but also on reproductive work? Will reproductive labor ever be considered labor? And finally, we will propose some preliminary solutions to begin framing steps forward.

## Keywords

Global Care Chain, Feminization of Globalization, Feminization of Migration, Transnational Care, Intersectional, Public and Private, Paid and Unpaid, Productive and Reproductive

## 1. Introduction

Historically, care work has been intensely feminized. Throughout diverse cultures and societies, it is common to see care work tied to a feminized understanding of nurturing care and emotional labor. Whether women are seen as more viable for childcare, domestic work, nursing, or teaching, the premise

emphasizes care work as feminized. Cultural perception views these tasks to be more 'suitable for gentle caring bodies', while more public waged jobs require a more 'aggressive, masculine' role. People migrate from one country to another as 'bodies' and in between cultures and social structures. Therefore, one would

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assume that views on care, gender, and norms would differ culturally and socially. However, throughout the literature and the overall interpretation of global care work, there is: "a strong implication, for not only who cares, and the form that care takes, but also for who can migrate to provide that care, and in what capacity. There is a conceptualization of care as it moves transnationally" [10].

Women are expected to *perform* their gender despite the context, society, and location. Performativity of gender is a stylized repetition of acts and imitation or miming of the dominant conventions of gender. Judith Butler [5] argues that the act that one does or performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrives on the scene. "Performativity is an expression that creates or pushes forward a transaction or an exchange between the performer and the spectator." Here the transaction comes at the expense of women [16]. As women perform their gender (which they have been socialized into performing) they find themselves at an interesting crux- 'citizen the earner' (breadwinner) and 'citizen the carer' (woman) [2].

In addition, women as mothers relocate transnationally to deliver care work, sometimes resulting in a care drain in their homelands and villages [7]. "The care drain is a hidden and undervalued feminized trend in which the extraction of migrant women's emotional surplus value from their left-behind children and families has enabled middle-class and wealthy women to devote themselves to their careers and avocations" (Ni, et al. 1970) These women who travel and leave dependents behind are often stigmatized for leaving their children. Furthermore, they take on double and triple burdens and are left to take care of families and children that are not their own—taking part in work like this generates alienation emotionally and in their work life.

Globalization has had positive effects; these effects are not equally distributed between different populations and regions, some of which are less adaptable than others to the entrance into the global market because of different living standards, environments, financial, political, and work conditions (Ruspini, 2019) [22].

## 2. Literature

### 2.1. Care Work in Spain/Latin America

After World War 2, as men were no longer required to take part in the military, they shifted back to active wage earners-'citizen the earner', and women were needed to fuel population growth and retreated to reproductive work-'citizen the carer.' By the 1970s, and after women's movements, women were integrated into the formal labor market in the global north as paid members of society [14]. The invisibility of women's unpaid reproductive labor continued to be highly problematic, it continued and continues to be unappreciated and unacknowledged as a driving reason for to continue productive work [1]. Women's unpaid labor includes a variety of unrecognized crucial roles and activities such as running a

household, reproductive labor, "which involve not only the reproduction of the social and material conditions that sustain the structural organization but also the reproduction and maintenance of the actual labor power" [9].

After women joined the international labor market in the 70s, the global economy required women to step up and into the labor market *without* ignoring their maternal obligations. Many scholars focusing on women's labor attribute the Thatcher/Reagan era as the time that represented numerous burdens for women – women were asked to formally step into the labor market while simultaneously increasing their care responsibilities. In Spain, many women could not perform this double duty of paid and reproductive labor. Therefore, they purchased another woman's help to free themselves from their domestic duties [15]. This global care chain links people worldwide and is based on paid and unpaid forms of labor. Given the societal understanding of production as the result of labor, much of women's unwaged work is hardly measurable. Their contribution to the household is not measurable and is seen as an 'expected' and 'voluntary projection of their nature' [9]. This creates real life implications that keep women undervalued, underrepresented, unappreciated, and unpaid- even when their domestic work (as global care workers) is a waged position.

In Spain, unlike many countries in the global south, household labor is regulated by domestic labor law which is composed of three main elements (and are vary from general labor ordinance) [8]. First, the earnings are typically *not in line with the work intensity*. Second, *domestic workers do not acquire the same unemployment benefits that other waged workers obtain*. Third, *there are no formal assessments of the home in which they work*, which results in exploitation and a lack of supervision. Many forms of exploitation range from labor and economic abuse to human trafficking. Thus, care work remains intensely gendered across the globe due to the nature of the work and societal perception of its 'feminine quality'. A lack of governmental authority, control, and supervision further exploits an already exploited population. It remains highly vulnerable, and the value given to domestic work continues to be disparagingly low. Moreover, while it remains to be women's burden, all of these exploitative circumstances continue to expand the discrepancies between gendered labor and women in the global economy [9, 6].

Because of their semi-legal or illegal status, they are exploited and taken advantage of. The government does not regulate their work office (the home where they work). Without documentation and paperwork, they can get paid very little, and their rights are neither safeguarded by the receiving nor their sending countries. In addition to all the exploitation, these migrating women must balance executing their motherhood and paid labor.

### 2.2. Care Work in Asia

Not all countries around the world view labor and care

work similarly. Huang [10] calls on us to reevaluate the notion of care and the global care chain from a viewpoint beyond the global north. In places like Asia, particularly with an aging population, there is a new trend in how care is given, especially for the elderly. After the rise of neoliberalism, care for the family has become increasingly acceptable to import in the form of domestic workers, healthcare workers, and even foreign brides. In Asia the continual reciprocity of care work in society is also seen. Care is understood and carried out differently in different spheres of the world, such as care work that is paid in public vs. private care that is unpaid in private. “Dynamic power of the discursive imagination impact, not only the ways care is understood and conceptualized, but also in influencing the way cares bodies, whether belonging to foreign brides, domestic workers, nurses, or other hair providers, reconfigured, and re-categorized as gender, class, racialized and nationalized, as they move between the different spaces, spheres, and sites” [10].

For example, Filipino women move through different spheres, from entertainment to care work. Alternatively, Chinese women, also switch from being domestic workers to the wives of their elderly Taiwanese employers—the care shifts from money to love -and sometimes lies somewhere in between [10]. In addition, care workers can pivot themselves, depending on where they want to be in the care hierarchy. Depending on the hierarchical ladder, they have autonomy and agency to decide whether they want to work as nurses, foreign domestic workers, or entertainers-regardless of their background and/or training. In Asia, the interchange of care, or filial piety, can be seen when parents care for their children, and in return, children care for their parents in their old age.

More affluent families and societies have the advantage of purchasing assistance for parents and grandparents in their old age, which has become widely sufficient and increasingly available. For example, in Vietnam, remittances are widely seen as sufficient reciprocal care. After a daughter marries out, she transmits remittances back home as monetary support from her labor abroad. As for the Taiwanese men who marry Chinese women to take care of them in their old age, there is reciprocity that comes in the form of long-term personal security for the Chinese woman and her children. These negotiated practices and interactions are prevalent in Asia and propose a complex interactive relationship between the caregiver and the receiver, evolving into a mutually dependent practice. Here care is not bilateral but reciprocal. Despite the difference in the exchange of this relationship, in the feminized care chain; the caregivers are still women. In addition, the government plays a significant role in whom it allows as care workers. For example, Singapore state allows women but not men to enter as foreign domestic care workers. Similarly, in Taiwan, the immigration policy makes it so that the immigration of wives can be of caregivers and not that of the husbands [10].

In addition to the negotiation that take shape in the form of care work and social connection, there is another layer of

negotiated gendering through care work. A negotiation in work roles both waged and unwaged work is seen. According to Zimmerman West, gender and the accountability of gender involves negotiations and is profoundly social and not individual. Because of this joint action, not one person performs or does gender on their own. Thus, although these migrating women become the primary breadwinners and take on a primary role that is not traditionally viewed as feminine (migrating and becoming the primary breadwinners), they are still *confined* to their female gender as care workers- because of societal views on gender and female work as caring and nurturing. There is not a moment where these women act individually but are often negotiating their role in society- because of societal, historical, patriarchal influences and social negotiations constantly at play.

### 3. Transnational Nanny Care Work

In addition to re-examining care work from a perspective other than the global north, there also needs to be an examination of language usage to describe care work. In *re-examining the transnational nanny*, Brown suggests that ‘language usage can be very binary. Oversimplifying terms, such as north and south, domination and dependency, and winners and losers- is an oversimplification of a very complex migration story’. In addition to that, Brown says viewing migration as a linear process overlooks the nuanced and longitudinal paths of migration that care workers often traverse. For example, female migrants often migrate internally within their own countries, or re-migrate back to their own countries, and often migrate back and forth between countries. When migration is studied, these multi-directional routes are often ignored in many cases, as is the longitudinal view of migrants being other than just ‘reproductive,’ ‘biological,’ and ‘linear.’ “After considering everything, considerable evolutions that migrants often partake in from being care receivers as children to care workers as adults, and then care receivers again in old age, is common. Focusing on a language and a longitudinal framework allows researchers to understand and study various experiences migrants undertake, such as the way migrants experience time, the feelings of being in two places at once, Internet and technology in cultivating a virtual family, and “understanding how this interrupts the direct relationship between linear time progression and geographical permanence” [3].

There cannot be a discussion about the physical without the emotional in care work. Arlie Hochschild [11] coined the term ‘global heart transplant’ to explain this phenomenon. “The migration of care workers from third world to first world countries induces a global heart transplant that benefits the rich child at the expense of the poor” [11]. Hochschild uses a Marxist global supply chain to discuss the experience of migrant care workers. This theory attributes feelings of terrible sadness to mothers because of the emotional surplus value they produce when caring for first-world children rather than

their own. She argues that the emotional displacement of care continues when a poor woman, presumed rural, leaves her own children to care for those of international migrants. In addition to viewing this Marxist supply chain of migration of care workers, there is a stratification of the unequal international division of labor that is intersectionally racialized and gendered.

Brown [3] proposes that applying an affective lens to the care of migration can make visible the shifting subjectivities, experiences, and insights of resistance that characterize the daily lives of migrant caregivers. Grounding these diverse embodied experiences in affective approaches can develop a vocabulary of resistance that promotes a coalitional consciousness predicated on the difference. Using an affective lens would link bodies and add "nuance, history, and political understanding to care, workers, labor, and work" [3]. The embodied experiences that can be relatable and understandable when reading a migrant's experience and story, such as: sweaty armpits and nervously waiting in airport cues when applying for visas or extensions, can make accounts more relatable and intelligible [3]. Affective labor literature also addresses how diverse forms of work demand the individual to construct feelings and behaviors in themselves and others in such a way that blurs the line between labor and emotion. Hochschild's *Managed Heart* [11] observes that gendered expectations influence which bodies are expected to smile, laugh, and listen and which mandate authority is helpful and understanding, historically gendered formations of the migrant subjects.

## 4. Transnational Mothering and Care Sharing

Women that take care of children and the elderly elsewhere leave behind a gap concerning their care and responsibilities; Hochschild outlines that healthcare workers in the Global South are commercialized and outsourced to female migrants in the first world. "These migrants usually leave their families behind; consequently, a care gain in the receiving country implies a care drain in the sending country... the winners are the families at the top of the global care chain, who buy care work and gain emotional surplus value." (Hochschild, 2012). In addition to the complicated tasks mothers take on when they migrate to provide for their families- they are simultaneously left to organize care replacements for their families who are left behind.

When women migrate, they leave behind fathers and other female members of the family. Research has found that women leave the fathers behind; but fathers do not step up and take the mothering role. When the mother becomes the family's primary breadwinner, grandmothers are usually the most crucial group of carriers that step in to fill the mother's absence. Although there is a discussion of role reversal in male migration studies, the absence of fathers has been more acceptable than the absence of mothers. And due to notions of masculine

identity, when fathers lose their role as the primary breadwinner, they "have little to gain by taking over the role of a caring mother because that is linked to the loss of status rather than to the gain of social prestige" [13].

If the grandmother is not available to fill in, the role predominantly falls on the shoulders of more senior siblings to look after one another. At this point, the parent-child hierarchy becomes blurred, and teenagers fill in as replacement parents. Often, youth lose their childhood and having to take on educational and financial roles, resulting in a lack of time for themselves. If both siblings and grandmothers are unable to fill in, care sharing has become a popular technique that is welcomed by many migrant women who are forced to share their own mothering duties with the women left behind in their country of origin. The women left behind may be family members, close friends, or even more impoverished women that step in to fill the migrating women's mothering role. The children left behind in the country of origin have been pejoratively termed "euro-orphans", or "social orphans", as their parents are "hungry for euros" and have left them behind and neglected them [13].

In addition, migrating women must create schedules by alternating months between work and home. Upon returning home, they must take care of ignored household tasks and compensate for the dearth from their own children's lives. The responsibility placed on women in migration has been invisible in much of the literature. Much of the contemporary debate about migration, and particularly female migration, scandalizes the "absence of mothers, the targets being blamed are primarily women, and they are seen as being responsible for the neglect of their own children" [13].

## 5. Transnational Mothering and Cyberspace

Cyberspace has allowed mothers to continue mothering from a distance, inducing 'hyper materialism'. While away, they can check on their children on platforms like Skype, make sure they got home safely, assist with homework, and send words of affection. In a way, they can still interact with their families and be a part of their daily lives. Although this has succeeded generally, children often do not share vulnerable experiences with their parents. Communication issues can be challenging, and virtual contact allows children and family members to hide their feelings to not burden each other. So, instances of bad news from school or about other family members can often be camouflaged to not bother their mother with bad news.

"Cyberspace communication cannot erase the sadness, longing, and guilt of loved ones who are physically far away; it, nevertheless, enables the exchange of letters, memories, and social expectations about love that are into effect as they circulate across borders. The Internet, which creates a space for animated interaction between bodies



separated by great physical distance, invokes a hyper-reality. Across cyberspace, the circulation of emotions, objects, and signs through video on phone calls also allows migrants to express love and care in many ways that transform gendered subjectivities" [3].

Interview with Refugee Resettlement Center Director (T):

Upon interviewing the Director ("T") at a local refugee resettlement center in Florida, I asked her if the same labor inequalities and gendered labor applies to refugees and immigrants arriving in the United States.

Shahd: Do you see many refugees and immigrants getting employed in their prior skillset after arriving in the United States?

T: Absolutely not. Most refugees and immigrants, especially those from professional backgrounds, often find themselves working in jobs and spaces they have not worked in before. For example, there was a gentleman that used to own a restaurant back in his home country. Now he is washing dishes at restaurants. Or for example, I have another guy who used to be a pharmacist and now he does handiwork around people's homes. You can only imagine what this does to one's self esteem.

Shahd: What about the gender division of labor? Do you see men and women entering different jobs based on societal views of who should perform what?

T: With the refugees and immigrants arriving in the United States, we continue to see this division of labor in the different areas where work is chosen [or available]. Women are generally chosen to [or choose to] work in education (e.g. teaching their native language at schools or via private tutoring). Alternatively, women find themselves in the culinary field (e.g. working in authentic restaurants or private catering). They also work in domestic work (e.g. cleaning homes or homemaking.) Finally, we see women in other forms of care work (e.g. elder care, child rearing, nanny care), as these are the jobs normally attributed to women, and I think women have accepted this as their fate.

Shahd: What about the female refugees at the center? Have they been employed before migrating or are they now forced to work to make ends meet? Also, how does this change the dynamic within their family?

T: We have two women working with us who have never been employed before. They used to be a stay-at-home moms. Both say they find employment liberating. It was tough for them because they had to learn how to balance home life with work life and the emotional burden they were carrying as refugees. However, both, in addition to other refugees at our center, find work to be a nice distraction.

Regarding the family dynamic, there was a gentleman who was not interested in having his wife work *at all*; he did not want her to work *for* anyone. He also wanted to be the primary breadwinner and was not interested in having his wife assist him in that department. However, this was not something that bothered her; it made me sad though. Because instead of feeling this way, they could have two incomes to support their

family and live a little bit more comfortably. With time, he may change the way he views employment. Many men, when they first come here, hold very masculine traditional beliefs about how they should be their primary breadwinner and their wives should not have to carry the burden of working and getting an income. However, after living in the country for a while, many of them change their views and are a lot more practical in their approach.

## 6. Discussion

The global care chain is highly feminized and invisible, as seen in the literature. Through the forces of globalization, there is a boom in migration and the interconnectedness of labor market integration. However, globalization has hurt the global south, and women have been exploited as "the most globalized subjects of all."

When Spivak [17] questioned if the subaltern could speak, she eloquently poised,

"She is invisible and silenced by two crushing discourses: a masculinist discourse of imperialism and an equally masculinist reactionary anti-imperialism. Consequently, the subaltern woman and other feminized subjects have no language, rhetoric, common discourse, or even voice to express their subjectivities" [24].

While women constantly migrate to earn an income and support their families, the intentional forces that keep them invisible are ever-present. As globalization exacerbates capitalism and patriarchy, male dominance is seen as the root cause of the division of labor resulting in a hierarchical relationship between genders [19]. These gendered categories are lived and experienced "differently, depending on one's class, the city, nationality, and sexuality" [12]. Therefore, one cannot independently study this topic from one angle. The interconnectedness of the intersectional aspects of history, empires, gender, race, social status, nationality, class, ethnicity, and so on cannot be untangled and exclusively categorized [18]. As Patil explains, the container is 'not empty'; it already bares the images and effects of centuries of imperial travel.

"In short, we must rescale gender: rather than content being constructed primarily at the scale of culture or society or nation, both content and concept operate within multiscalar webbed connectivities produced by histories and contemporary operations of empire" [20].

A broader, more inclusive dialogue needs to take place. We need to question: How can there be a change so that women's work is no longer invisible? How can we build a society where individuals are esteemed not just on monetized work but also on reproductive work? Will reproductive labor ever be considered labor? Unfortunately, the questions are challenging to tackle. Context varies from region to region based on society, culture, perceptions, and understandings. Nevertheless, through NGOs, a formal and structured labor contract can and should be enforced throughout countries. After all, globalization has connected the world, and NGOs can use

different forms of globalization policy to their advantage to protect care workers, women's labor, reproductive work, and exploited populations [21].

## 7. Conclusion

Globalization has linked people from various parts of the globe in many ways. There have been favorable elements of networking, growing social circles, and the capacity to partake in the global economy. The consequences of globalization have been many. Exploited populations have been further exploited, the rich have gotten richer, and the global scene has brought together immense power forces that further exploit vulnerable populations.

The global care chain varies in different parts of the world. While rarely some governments have formalized protection clauses for care workers, many nations in the global south do not share that same privilege. In addition, it is clear that global care work as deeply gendered and feminized. Due to the notion that care work is a voluntary, natural, feminine duty- the responsibility of care work is heaved onto women as an expectation. Women are expected to accomplish mothering duties, childcare, amusement for men, and other household reproductive work that goes overlooked and unrewarded. Furthermore, because individuals in society value productive work that is monetized, reproductive work remains undervalued and underpaid. Due to patriarchal hegemony and worldwide masculine domination, women continue to earn less, be exploited, and remain historically marginalized [23].

While many care workers have the agency of choice to travel and become the primary breadwinners of their households, they continue to be unequal players even after entering formal labor markets. In addition, taking on primary breadwinner roles does not free them from their care responsibilities at home. Many find themselves mothering from a distance, returning to overlooked household chores after returning from work abroad, and thrust into very feminized work that assumes the need for their voluntary caring bodies.

Time and again, women are put in these positions where they must perform a female gender identity that they continue to be socialized into learning. In the famous words of Simone de Beauvoir, 'One is not born but rather becomes a woman.' Even while taking care of children that are not their own, they must continually perform emotional, 'feminine traits' of caring and represent themselves to the world to be more employable.

"When we say gender is performed, we usually mean that we have taken on a role, or we are acting in some way and that our acting or role-playing is crucial to the gender that we are and the gender that we present to the world" [4].

Thus, there becomes a double and triple burden that women are expected to carry between the emotional surplus of reproductive and productive work. In addition to battling guilt upon leaving dependents behind, they begin to feel alienated as they enact and perform gendered care for other's children.

The fundamental problem is how women are valued, represented, and waged. The hierarchical gendered division of labor prevents many women from reaching higher positions while aiding in women's exploitation. Women will always remain invisible until they are valued for their productive and reproductive work. The system will continue to exploit them until governments and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) intervene to protect women's rights. And finally, until there is a change in our view as a whole on which gender performs which job, the hierarchical division of labor will remain. The onus is on all of us.

## Abbreviations

NGOs Non-Governmental Organizations

## Author Contributions

Alasaly Shahd is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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