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**Transnational Families in the Philippines**
Grandmothers and Children Left Behind

Madeleine Karlsson
Martina Ruuth
MID SWEDEN UNIVERSITY
Institution of Social Work

Examiner: Masoud Kamali, masoud.kamali@miun.se
Supervisor: Jorge Calbucura, jorge.calbucura@miun.se
Author: Madeleine Karlsson, maka1054@student.miun.se
Author: Martina Ruuth, maru1008@student.miun.se
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Transnational Families in the Philippines:  
Grandmothers and Children Left Behind

MADELEINE KARLSSON  
*Mid Sweden University, Sweden*

MARTINA RUUTH  
*Mid Sweden University, Sweden*

Abstract

• *Summary:* Qualitative interviews were conducted to grandmothers and children living in transnational families in the Philippines. The study aims to examine how they experience their life situation and how they find strategies to cope with difficulties that may appear in transnational family life.

• *Findings:* The grandmothers experience difficulties with ageing and health problems in their role as caregivers, and the children experience difficulties with new responsibilities such as household chores, taking care of younger siblings and manage school. For both respondents the financial benefits with having a family member working abroad is the most important.

• *Applications:* The results are discussed in the context of globalization, transnational families and gender.

**Keywords:** Transnational families, grandmothers, caregivers, children, remittances, Philippines

Introduction

The Philippines is a heavily populated land, with a population around 102 million, and one third of the population in the Philippines lives below the poverty threshold. Remittances from family members working across the nations have an impact on the survival of poor families. Estimated over a million Filipinos emigrate every year to
support their left-behind families economically (Sweden Abroad, 2011). According to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) there are approximately 8.6 million overseas Filipinos (POEA, 2009a). Among the new hires from 2009 the majority of overseas workers were women and since 1992 the women have been overrepresented in overseas employment. In 2009 67 per cent of the new hired females were employed in the service sector (for example domestic work, household work and caretakers) (POEA, 2009b) Year 2011 remittances from Filipino overseas workers exceeded 20 billion USD (POEA, 2011). The Philippine government enlarged and diversified the labour exports as a way of dealing with the unemployment and secure investments from foreign countries through remittances. This has developed into a dependency of overseas employment not only for the government, but also for the families in the Philippines (Parreñas, 2002).

Transnational families in the Philippines are a common phenomenon due to economic globalization and labour migration (Madianou & Miller, 2011). Transnational families are members of a family nuclear unit that live separated from each other, in different households and across nations, yet hold together, creating a feeling of shared welfare and unity, of “familyhood” (see Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Borell, Warsame & Rask, forthcoming). Transnational families express the basic conditionality of the relationship between families and households: family commitments can coincide with the boundaries of a household, but family relations may also incorporate several households (Borell, 2003). The family constellations may also be different in diverse cultures and contexts, which should be considered. The western nuclear family model cannot be assumed as certain in other cultures, especially in developing countries such as the Philippines, where extended families and transnational families can be seen as the norm (Parreñas, 2005a; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011).

As previously mentioned, transnational families in the Philippines occurs as an effect of labour migration and when mothers migrate significant changes in family life emerge. Since traditional gender ideologies remains, the fathers and other males in the households are discouraged to contribute in childrearing, which leads to a care crisis. The dominant gender ideologies appoint that the women should remain in the households, and migrant mothers challenges this view (Parreñas, 2002). Earlier studies exist on the immigrated mother and the left-behind family members in the Philippines, and the maintenance and reconfiguring of their family relationship. Most studies focus on how to maintain emotional strings, intimacy and mothering from a distance (see for
example Madianou & Miller, 2011; Parreñas, 2001; Parreñas, 2005b). They examine family separation and emotional consequences, which is not excluded in our study since it is central in transnational family life, though the main focus in this study is how the family members left behind in the Philippines experience their life situation. Life situation in this study refers to social reality, every day life and how to find strategies to cope with difficulties that may appear. Mazzucato and Schans (2011) indicate that caregivers, if other than the parent, have an impact on children’s wellbeing, which assumes that the caregivers in transnational families play an important role. Deficient in earlier studies is the caregivers’ point of view, not only on the children’s situation but also on their own experience of living in a transnational family and what it means to their life. This study is important for social work since the profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance wellbeing. The effects of globalization leaves families no other choice than to separate, mothers leaving their children, for their family members wellbeing and survival. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work, which is why this is an important issue to pay attention to for social work science (IFSW, 2012). Our aim is to examine two different actors in transnational families: the grandmothers’ perspective of living in a transnational family and their role as a caregiver, and the children’s perspective of having a mother working abroad. How do the grandmothers and the children experience their life situation? And how do the children and grandmothers find strategies to cope with difficulties that may appear in transnational family life? Data is collected by a total of seven semi-structured interviews with family members in transnational families where the female is away. The impact of globalization plays a central role on the migration trends in the Philippines and will be further examined, as will transnational families and the traditional gender roles.

Globalization
A common definition of globalization is that it consists of hypermobility, international communication, and a neutralization of distance and place. Globalization consists of two parts, one is the dispersal of economic activities and the neutralisation of space, and the other one is the territorial concentration of top-level management, control operations, and the most advanced special services. The last part includes the people working for the top managers as domestic workers, such as cleaners and nannies. This
is often forgotten in the most common definition of globalization, but this is the part on which our study will focus on (Sassen, 2002).

One of the issues with globalisation is whether it has produced a new kind of migration, with new conditions and dynamics of its own. For example when women migrate for domestic work from poor countries to wealthier they help creating new formations such as global cities and survival circuits. The global cities contains lots of economic resources and key functions, it also inquires low-paid workers, some directly as repairmen and cleaners for companies, some indirectly as nannies and domestic workers for high-income professionals. Immigrants often fill this working sector. Meanwhile, survival circuits are built among women in developing countries, they emerge in societies where the state resources to meet social needs are diminishing, there are lots of unemployment, poverty, and bankruptcies of a large number of firms. This leads to an increasing responsibility for women to find new survival strategies such as low-wage workers, prostitutes or migrant workers sending remittances home (Sassen, 2002).

As an effect of globalization women seem to be on their move more than ever before. Women in industrialized countries are entering careers, earlier represented by only men, by turning over their traditional responsibilities of taking care of the house, elderly and children to women in developing countries. Millions of women from poor countries are migrating to richer countries to work as nannies, maids and domestic workers. These migrating women leave their homes and children in the care of relatives. The lifestyles of women in industrialized countries are made possible by import of female labour from developing countries. Wealthier countries have historically imported natural resources and agricultural products from colonized and concurred countries in the south. Meanwhile this proceeds, northern countries have extended their imports to something more abstract in terms of migrants for traditional female tasks (Sassen, 2002).

**Transnational families and gender**

What makes a transnational family still a family? There is still intimacy across boarders through regular communication such as phone calls, letters, e-mails, voice recordings, SMS, and remittances (Parreñas, 2005b). Non-governmental organizations estimate that there are about nine million children in the Philippines growing up in a transnational family, with one or two parents working abroad (Parreñas, 2005a). Even if the Philippine government encourage overseas employment and is dependent on
migrant workers remittances the government officials and journalists denounce migrating mothers, blaming them to cause family derogation, with abandoned children. Labour migration has not always been associated with family separation problems in the Philippine discourse; it emerged when the female migration increased. However, transnational labour migration causes a tremendous change for families, both for family members left behind and for the migrating member. They go through a series of new adjustments when it comes to family relations, practical and economical structures. This seems to emerge even greater when the woman in a family migrates and undertakes the role as breadwinner, which is traditionally assumed by a man (Parreñas, 2002; Madianou & Miller, 2011).

Labour migration as an effect of the economical globalization at times leads to problems such as family separations. Transnational families might have more financial stability, comparing to other families still living together in the Philippines, but they also have to deal with the consequences of family separation. Earlier studies indicate on the emotional dilemma some left-behind children come across when their mothers are working abroad. They do not want their mothers to stop working abroad, but are at the same time not convinced that the financial stability is worth the emotional costs of the geographical distance (Parreñas, 2001; Madianou & Miller, 2011). The new caregiver plays a central role in the wellbeing of the left behind children. Existing studies show that children who take care of them self is more likely to get behavioural and academic problems than children in other care arrangements. Relatives, such as grandmothers, aunts or other extended kin, often take care of the left-behind children (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). Missing from earlier studies is the grandparents’ perspective of transnational family life and their experience of having a child abroad and becoming the caregiver of their grandchildren.

Labour migration challenges the ideals of “the family”, though gender plays a significant role in the new family structure. Since the woman plays a central role in family life, and has through history been counted as valueless economic actors, the female migration has an important impact on family life (Asis, Huang & Yeoh, 2004). The consequence of migrating mothers comes as rearrangements of households and a reconstruction in gender. In the Philippines society, as most other societies, the modern nuclear family consists of the breadwinning father and the nurturing mother. Earlier studies show that even though the mother takes over the role as the breadwinner, the traditional gender roles do not change in the household; the traditional female tasks are instead fulfilled by other women (Parreñas, 2005b). In this
study the migrating mothers hand over their traditional tasks to their mothers. Therefore, the left behind grandmothers takes over the caregiving and responsibilities for their grandchildren.

Methodology
Most studies on transnational families in South Asia examine left-behind children and their migrated parents, lacking the perspective of the caregivers. The studies examine transnational relations between migrant parents and their children, and how families achieve intimacy across boarders. Interviews are conducted with both migrated parents and left-behind family members (see for example Parreñas, 2001 & 2005b; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Hoang & Yeoh, 2012). Other studies focus on the wellbeing of children left-behind (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). Deficient in earlier studies is the grandparents, in their role as the caregiver, left behind in transnational families and their perspective on the family situation with an addition of the perspective of left-behind children. With “children” we mean adolescents also above 18 years old, who are children of migrated parents. In the study we will refer to them as adolescents, to make a clear distinction between them and the children that the grandmothers sometimes refers to. Data was collected by semi-structured interviews with left-behind family members in the Philippines. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to get a broader picture of the respondents’ life situation, but still stick to specific themes that we used to identify life situation. The study is based on four interviews with grandmothers who were also the caregivers of their grandchildren since their daughter(s) migrated for work. An additional three interviews were also conducted with children of migrant parents. Our sample was chosen by snowball method, where we used our contacts to find the first respondents, and then asked them for contact with more respondents. The interviews took place in the respondents’ homes or in a calm location at the local resort due to their wishes. The interviews with the grandparents took on average about 60 minutes and the interviews with the children about 40 minutes. All interviews were performed in the respondents’ native language, Tagalog, with an English translator. A conversation with the translator took place before the interviewing about linguistic and cultural differences. The translator was requested to treat the respondents with respect and translate as verbatim as possible. Using a translator can complicate the interview session; since we are not familiar with the native language we cannot be certain that the translation is exact. To our advantage most respondents understood English, even if they preferred to answer in Tagalog,
which made it possible for them to confirm the translation by nodding or adding things to the interview. Two semi-structured interview guides were used, one treating the grandparents’ and one the children’s experiences of their life situation, the contact they have with their family member abroad, changes in their everyday life and thoughts about their future (Calbucura, 2000). All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in English. Data was analysed using a narrative method to focus on how respondents find meaning in their life situation. We used a thematic analysis by going through the material finding mutual themes that emerged in the interviews. While categorizing data into different themes we tried to keep the respondents stories intact, by referring to the respondents own words in the result.

When studying people’s life situation it is important to make some ethical considerations. The children interviewed in this study are between 16 and 19 years old, since it would be inappropriate to interview younger children in this context. Before interviewing the adolescents, ethical considerations were discussed with three different professors at Mid Sweden University to make sure there were no ethical hesitations. When constructing the interview guide for the children, questions that could emerge adverse emotions and memories tried to be avoided. Considerations have also been taken to any possibility of stigmatising people in an exposed position, though since transnational families is a common phenomenon in the Philippines, it is considered normative in this context (Parreñas, 2005a). We also have to take into account that we are western citizens operating in a different context, which may have an impact on the respondents and our interpretation of the material, although we have tried to get a deeper understanding of the Philippine society and cleared our heads from all western views. To our advantage we lived together with the local people for two month, which helped us understand the Philippine approach of everyday life. All respondents have been informed about the purpose of the study, that their participation is voluntary and confidential, and that the data will be used only for this purpose. All names used are pseudonyms. Each interview ended with a conversation off record, where respondents could express their thoughts about the interview. To show gratitude for their participation respondents was receiving a gift.

Results
Presentation of respondents; Grandmothers

The grandmothers in our study are all caregivers of their grandchildren since they have at least one daughter working abroad. The daughters are working in South Asia, three of them in Arab Emirates, which is one of the richest countries in the world with a continuously developing economy (CIA, 2012). The number of grandchildren in their care is between two and six in the ages between two and sixteen years old. The grandmothers are between the age of 57 and 66 years old, with an average age of 62 years old. They all come from poor families, and none of them has received higher education than high school. The first respondent is grandmother Theresa who comes from a hard working family. She is a widow and has two daughters, both working abroad leaving their five children in her care. Both her daughters have college education and are working as secretaries at different companies in Abu Dhabi. The oldest have been abroad for two years, the youngest for one year. Theresa lives in the house where she has her eatery, and her grandchildren lives in a house nearby with their housemaid.

Dorothy’s mother died when she was very young, and she never finished high school. She had to start working as a housemaid in the age of 15 to be able to support her father and younger sister. At the age of 20 she took a job at a fabric company so that she could send her sister to college. Dorothy got married, 24 years old, and had five children, though one passed away early. None of her children have a college education, and her oldest daughter is from one year ago working as a housemaid in Singapore. Today Dorothy is a widow and living with her grandchildren.

Gemma grew up in a poor family of nine members. Together with her husband she has four children; two of them are now working abroad. Thanks to her husbands overseas employment they were able to send all their four children to college. Gemma’s oldest daughter is a nurse in Dubai, and her oldest son is an aircraft mechanic in the Arab Emirates. Her son and daughter have been working abroad for almost seven years and when her grandchildren in Dubai were three month and four years old she took them back to the Philippines to live with her, her husband and her youngest daughter.

The last respondent of the grandparents is Malika, growing up in the care of her aunt and uncle, after her father passed away. Malika studied until grade six when she moved with her aunt to Manila to work, and after a few years she started a course in dressmaking. When she was finished she moved back to the province and met her husband. They have five children, none of them with college education. Her oldest
daughter is, since four years, working in Dubai as a helper at a school. Malika is the one who takes care of her daughter’s two children; they live with her, her husband and the children’s father.

Presentation of respondents; Children
The three adolescents interviewed are females in the age of 16 and 19 years old. They have been living without a present mother between almost one year and five years. Samantha is 19 years old and studies science and business administration at the university. Her mother and father have been working in Dubai for five years, her mother works in a company and her father does dwelling jobs. She lives with her two younger sisters and older brother. They are taking care of themselves with support from their grandmother and cousins.

Lani is 16 years old and the 5th child in her family, she studies at an international health school. She has six siblings, two of them have graduated college and the others are still studying. She lives with five of her siblings, her father and grandparents. Her mother has been working in Pakistan as a domestic helper for almost four years. Her older sisters take care of the younger ones and the household responsibilities.

Carrie is 16 years old, senior high school student, living with her grandmother, three younger siblings and her two younger cousins. Her father is unemployed, living in a different city, and her mother is working in Singapore as a domestic helper. Carrie is in the care of her grandmother but helps taking care of her younger siblings.

Migration motives and priorities
The states dependency of remittances has made it hard for working class Filipinos, especially uneducated, to provide for their families. As the result shows it is no longer enough to be hard working, because the prime commodities is more expensive today. This leaves no other option for families with no education then to look for income from abroad. The Philippine government encourages overseas employment, as a complement to the global cities that inquire all different kinds of workforce, including low-paid workers, which facilitates for Filipinos to find work abroad (Parreñas, 2002; Sassen, 2002). When talking about the respondents’ life situations, all of them mention their financial situation before and after their daughter or mother migrated, it is clearly an important issue for them since it is the reason for the migration. Grandmothers’ agreed that the main reason for their daughters’ migration was to earn money and prepare for their children’s future, because in the Philippines it is hard to find
employment and the earnings are not much. Malika explains their situation as an effect of the economic changes in the Philippines:

Our situation before when I was young was a bit better then now because before the prime commodities where cheap unlike now when they are expensive. So even if you earn much more money [abroad] you also spend more money now.

Dorothy gives another example of the small earnings in the Philippines, where her daughter’s salary is not enough for her children’s schooling.

It’s better now because at least we can send our grandchildren to school and we can support their needs, but before with the small earnings she had she couldn’t send her children to school, even if it’s not good now because her salary is still small it is better than before.

Children’s education is not assured in Filipino families, the grandmothers express it as a struggle and a goal to send their children and grandchildren to school. Not only is college expensive, many children need to get a job to be able to support their families after finishing high school. Gemma, who comes from a poor family, gives an understanding of the importance of remittances and education:

I always prayed to God for my children to finish their studies so that they would not be like us. Because both my husband and I had no proper education so we were not able to get a nice job. So now we are just waiting for our sons and daughters for support. So it is a bit difficult because we cannot do anything about it. We are very thankful that our children were able to finish their studies and have a nice job because unlike us they won’t suffer the faith that we had.

By observing the diverse situations of the families financial wellbeing, significant differences emerged depending on if the migrant workers were educated or not. For those migrant workers with college degree the financial situation was much better than for those without. However, as Lani explains, education does not always result in a high-paid work abroad, her mother has a college degree but still works as a domestic helper abroad. There is significant difference between a low-paid work in the Philippines and abroad. Before Lani’s mother went to work abroad, they had some economical problems with debts and they did not know if they would be able to finish school and now the situation is stable, as she explains:
When my mother was still here, we don’t even know if we will graduate. Because my sister and brother are at college and I’m already elementary at that time, and I don’t know if God will provide, I’m not sure if we will have a good future, but now I’m sure that we will finish and next year I will go to college.

The adolescents interviewed express gratitude for their mothers work abroad, since they know it gives them the opportunity to graduate college and ensure a brighter future. By experiencing economical problems that causes family separation, as the mother leaves to work abroad, they feel a big responsibility and motivation to be graduated college so that they can provide for a better future for themselves and help their family financially.

The time spent abroad also had an effect on the financial situation, the more time spent working abroad, the better the situation. Gemma describes her grandchildren, whose parents had been working abroad almost seven years, as spoiled with plenty of material things. She expresses gratitude for her children’s education that also has an important impact on the financial wellbeing of the family. Even if she suffered breast cancer, with lots of expensive healthcare and medicines, the financial situation is stable and promising. Gemmas children had as their goal to work abroad after finishing their studies, for Dorothy the situation was different. As she explains, her daughter and grandchildren came to live with her when her husband passed away, because her earnings were no longer enough to support her. Her daughter tried to support the family by selling food, but the situation was hard and left them no other choice than to look for other opportunities.

The situation was very, very hard, we had a hard time affording every day expenses, my daughter looked for employment but it’s hard here in […] because there are no jobs especially since she didn’t have any college education. We started to realise that we soon have to stop sending the children to school because we just couldn’t afford it. And then, what? Will my grandchildren have the same situation when they grow up and have a family?

Dorothy explains that they came to the point where they had to do some sacrifices for the family. The idea of overseas employment came from their neighbours, who were able to send all their children to college, since they had a family member working abroad. The job in Singapore was found by a friend of Dorothy’s daughter, who was also working abroad among other Filipinos. All of the respondents admit finding the
work abroad through contact with other Filipinos who have experiences of overseas employment.

All of the migrant workers in our study immigrated to cities such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Singapore, besides one who went to Pakistan because of a recommendation from a good friend. The first cities mentioned, have in common to be highly developed economic countries in South Asia. As an effect of globalization, these cities become global since it has lots of economic resources and key functions, which inquires low-paid workers, often in form of migrant workers (Sassen, 2002). There are good connections between the Philippines and these cities, which makes travelling easier and more affordable. Although, the respondents state that the main reason for migration to these cities is contact with other Filipino migrant workers over there.

**Ageing and difficulties in the role as a caregiver**

When women migrate for work and becomes the breadwinner, they challenge the traditional gender roles. Earlier studies shows that the responsibilities associated with the female gender tend to stay as female responsibilities (Parreñas, 2005b). Responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning and caring for the children is built up on the backs of other women, in these cases the grandmothers. Along with ageing this may result in some difficulties. For example in Dorothy’s case, which is the caregiver for her six grandchildren, a normal day can contain many different tasks, as she describes:

> I’m the one who cooks and prepares the meals every day. […] In the morning I wake the kids up, prepare their meal, and some go to school in the morning others in the afternoon, so it’s my daily routine to send the kids to school and then pick them up after school. […] And everyday with these grandchildren I have to wash lots of clothes [laughing]. I’m an all-around worker. I was supposed to be having my grand time but it’s not yet for me.

Dorothy is also the one who struggles to make the budget for everyday expenses. Not to be forgotten is Dorothy’s earlier life as a mother for her children, where she also suffered a lot of stress from in-laws who did not want her, poverty, an alcoholic husband who died of drinking, and her early role as the breadwinner. As she mentions she was expecting to have her grand time by now, but the care responsibilities starts all over again. She explains that her ageing results in difficulties to handle daily routines. It is also well known that ageing derives health risks. This is the case with Gemma who suffered breast cancer and explains her everyday difficulties:
Everyday especially when there are classes I’m always preparing them for school, putting on their uniforms, prepare food and take them to school. I am always praying to God that I will be able to do all my obligations and responsibilities for my grandchildren. Because sometimes I feel tired since I was operated, it is not the same as before when I was healthy. I do the work so slowly unlike before when I moved fast. I am still on medication and I think it will go on for at least five years more, so if my children weren’t working abroad I could not even afford all my medication. I know that it is God you should ask for help first but I also know that if my children didn’t work abroad I would never afford the operation and all the medicine. I am very thankful for my children’s financial support, and also for my youngest daughter that helps me with the household chores.

Gemma thinks God meant for her youngest daughter to be unemployed so that she can help her with the household responsibilities. As described, health problems and ageing results in difficulties in their situation. There is a need for assistance, like Gemma needs her daughter’s support, Malika, who still has good health, has a laundry machine as her material assistance. Thanks to their financial support her family were able to buy the laundry machine, before she had to wash all the clothes by hand, which was difficult, and now it is very effective. Theresa suffered a stroke and because of her family’s financial situation they could hire a full time helper for her grandchildren and household chores.

**Love, care and gifts from the left-behind children's perspective**

Communication in different ways between family members in transnational families is important to remain as a family and maintain intimacy across boarders (Parreñas, 2005b). The children in this study, both the children in the care of the grandmothers and the adolescents interviewed, provide some kind of communication with their mothers abroad and the importance of communication with the mothers is much more significant than with the fathers abroad. The longing for a parent is in these cases connected to the mother even if the father also is working abroad in some of the cases. While talking about their life situation, fathers are almost not mentioned at all throughout the interviews, especially if he is also working abroad. However, all the children in this study express longings for their mothers abroad. It is not that complicated for the children to have regular communication with their mother abroad, especially if the household maintains a computer where they can talk to each other via Skype or chat. Other communication alternative is by cell phone, whether through calls or text messages. The family’s financial status has an impact on how regular the
communication with the family members across borders can persist. Malikas’ grandchildren, who are nine and ten years old, are regularly customers at the local computer shop where they at least twice a week talk to their mother via Skype. She explains that it helps them to sustain a relationship with their mother even if they sometimes miss her presence. Thanks to the benefits of the mother’s overseas employment she is lucky to be able to go home for a vacation and visit them in the Philippines. Malika explains that her grandchildren sees their mothers visits as more of a fun time rather than caring time, and quotes them:

When mom is here she always cooks delicious food for us and we go shopping and we go to the park and we always have a good time. I would like her to stay here, I like it when she is here!

For the younger children to refer “fun time” and gifts with their mother is repeatedly mentioned by the grandmothers. They also explain that even though education for the children is the main reason for their mothers leaving to work abroad, there is some kind of need for the mothers “to get their children what they want” and “fulfil their needs”. This has become important factors for the mothers while working abroad. Fun time and gifts from the mother emerges as a comfort for these children while not having her present and also a way for the mother to sustain a relationship with their children. As Gemma explains:

I think that my daughter, the mother of my grandchildren, is thinking that because she is not here always to take care of her own children she buys them a lot of things like expensive clothes, shoes and toys. Because she cannot show them that she loves them and can take care of them she buys a lot of material things instead, and I think that it is too much. […] My youngest grandchild [4 years old] even has a cell phone and a playstation. They are spoiled because their parents think that they are lacking of care from them, so that is filled with material things.

The grandmothers do not express any worries for their grandchildren’s absence of love and care. As in Gemma’s case who took care of her grandchild since she was a little baby and as she describes “it is like if I was the one who gave birth to her”. She explains that she has been the caregiver for her grandchildren since they were so young that they do not refer to their mother as the primary caregiver. Gemma also explains this phenomenon as usual in the Philippines. Although, there is another
perspective of having a mother abroad among the children left behind. There is a different understanding, between the younger children and the adolescents, about the family situation when having a mother working abroad. As Dorothy explains that the younger children think that: “my mum told me that she’s going to send me some chocolate” so it is enough for them because they are still young. Among the adolescents there are a more genuine understanding of why their mother are working abroad and why she left in the first place. Madianou and Miller (2011) show that children left behind know that their mother working abroad provides a better financial situation for the family, although, they still experience family separation. It is explained as an emotional dilemma. Lani expresses that the remittance has come to be a relief, but not without consequences:

Before it’s good to be with her, because she’s always there to protect us and give us some advice but financially it’s not good. But now it’s mixed emotions I want her here so that she can be with us but I also want her financial support so that we can finish our studies. […] But emotional… on our hearts it’s hard. It’s hard to… to do some decisions without the knowledge of a mother. Because when she’s still here she’s always telling us what to do, she’s always guiding us. But now she’s calling us by cell phone and making some guiding to us through cell phone. We talk at least once every two days.

All the adolescents interviewed expressed mixed emotions like Lani. Even if they want their mother to reunite with them again, they still have the understanding of why she left in the first place and what consequences would occur if she came back to the Philippines.

Changes in life situation and thoughts about the future
Labour migration causes changes for families, as in new adjustments when it comes to family relations and their practical and economical situation. Changes become more significant when the mother emigrates, leaving the traditional female tasks to another women (Parreñas, 2002; Madianou & Miller, 2011). All grandmothers’ interviewed agreed to changes in their life situation since their daughters’ moved abroad. A financially better situation since the migration was responses that corresponded throughout the interviews. As for changes in everyday life, with responsibilities and routines, the responses were more diverse. However, none of the grandmothers experienced any radical change in everyday life, the household chores and caregiving for grandchildren was basically the same as before their daughters migrated. They all
lived in the same house as their grandchildren before (apart from Theresa), and being a part of their life is usual for them. Even if they had practical support from their daughters’ before when they lived together, the practical support can be found somewhere else, as mentioned earlier, as long as they get financial support. Dorothy tells that the financial support is still small, she struggles with her ageing and extra chores for earning more money, but the responsibilities of caregiving given to her is not seen as a problem:

It’s ok for me because I think it is also my duty because they are my grandchildren, they are my blood, so I think that if I give them love and care then when I get older and can’t work any more, they will love me in return and take care of me. […] Even if it’s very hard for others I’m already used to it, but sometimes I’m also having a hard time and especially with my age [Laughing]. It’s just natural.

Changes in everyday life were more noticeable in the adolescents’ life situation. Samantha who is the oldest sister living with her three siblings has managed the household without their migrant parents for five years. She admits going through a hard time at first, but her grandmother who lives nearby helped them sometimes and today they are used to the situation. In Lani’s family the grandparents and her father has a modest role when it comes to house-holding, instead it’s her older sisters that has the most responsibilities. Lani explains that besides all the routines that changed in her and her siblings’ life, they also had their youngest brother to take care of, who was only two years old at the time of the migration. Although, Lani does not experience a lot of hardship with the new routines and household chores, since her mother prepared her and her siblings well by practicing cooking, cleaning and other household chores with them while still living together. It is also her older sisters who perform most of the household chores, and being responsible for the younger ones.

For Carrie the situation is slightly different, since she is the oldest among three siblings her mother declared her as “the second-mother” during the time her mother is working abroad. She says her siblings are often naughty and that they fight a lot, but respect her due to the situation. Managing the budget from her mother and a gambling father, which is very insecure, is one of Carries daily routines since her mother’s migration. Sometimes when the money sent to her is not enough for daily expenses she has to loan money from relatives or other people.
It is hard for me because I have two other brothers and a sister to take care of and I’m the oldest so it is my responsibility to look after them when my mother and father are away. It is a lot of responsibility for a young girl like me, I’m just a fourth year High school student girl so it is hard for me to balance my studies and the responsibilities for my brother and sisters.

Carrie lives with her grandmother since three years, who gives her support and care. She moved there two years before her mother’s migration together with her mother and siblings, because her grandfather passed away. Although she is having a hard time managing household responsibilities and studies, Carrie is determined to go to college and become a lawyer to be able to support her family.

Then I would like to work and help my mother and my parents, of course our grandmother who took care of us, and I wouldn’t let my mother go abroad again, I would never like to be separated from her again because we miss her a lot, mostly my youngest brother. Sometimes he asks me when our mother will come back, and I can’t tell him because I really don’t know.

The other adolescents, like Carrie, aim high for their future careers, for example Lani who wishes to become a civil engineer. Mutual future goals are to be able to give financial support to family members, either to provide for younger siblings education, parents, grandparents or older siblings that has family at early age. As in Lani’s case, who desires to support her brother, while he is having a hard time as the only working family member providing for his wife and child. Lani explains how her mother always keeps on telling her not to have a boyfriend in their phone calls, afraid that she will end up like her brother and not be able to finish her studies.

The adolescents’ future-thoughts correlate with the grandparents, in terms of financial support. Adolescents’ wish for a well-paid work of their own, and grandmothers’ whish for a brighter future and education for their grandchildren and children. Dorothy’s wish for the future is more remittances from her daughter, as she explains:

I just wish that my daughter would have a bigger salary so that I could stop washing clothes [for earning extra money], because I’m not getting any younger, so I keep on praying that my daughter would get a bigger salary so that she could support us well.
Only one of the grandmothers wished for a family reunion in the future. Other respondents had wishes for their grandchildren to have a good life, get a house in a nicer place, be strong, and get wisdom. Gemma leaves her future in God's hands and keeps praying for good health. Grandmothers hopes and dreams for the future was much more directive to their family members than themselves. When we asked Malika about dreams for herself, she was surprised:

Me? [laughs] I don’t have any dreams for me, I am too old. But my other daughter was telling me that if she were able to save money she would take me to Hong Kong for a vacation some day. […] If she could push that through it would be a big vacation for me! [laughs]

Conclusions
The large amount of migrant workers, sending remittances home, has come to affect the family life in the Philippines. Our study aims to examine how two different actors, grandmothers and children, in transnational families experience their life situation. To give a brighter understanding of transnational families and why this is a common phenomenon in the Philippines, we examine the effects of globalization. The result shows how globalization affects families on micro level. It has made it easier to work abroad and remittances have influenced the Philippine economy in ways that a regular salary in the Philippines is no longer enough for every day expenses. Countries with diminishing state resources to meet social needs, poverty and unemployment leaves an increasing responsibility on women to find survival strategies (Sassen, 2002). The Philippines is a clear example of this, where women have to react beyond borders to help support their families, due to the high rates of unemployment. As we experienced, transnational families were not hard to get in contact with since several households are consistent of one or more family members working abroad.

Parreñas (2002) explains how the Philippine government blames mothers to cause family derogation, abandoning their children for work abroad. This was not shown in our study, none of the respondents expressed any feelings of family derogation or abandonment. Instead they saw it as a sacrifice for the wellbeing of the family. They did, on the other hand, experience some difficulties in every day life. The grandmothers experience difficulties with ageing, health problems, and the strength to still be caregivers for young children and the chores that comes with it. When speaking for the younger children in their care, they explain that they miss their mother sometimes, but their relationship is often related to fun time. It is not
unexpected that these children mention their mothers in ways of gifts and fun time, since the mothers try to fulfill their suspected needs with gifts instead of physical love and care. Although, the children cannot be presumed as lacking of care since they still have their grandmothers as their caregiver. Most of them have lived with and been in the care of their grandmothers’ even before their mother went to work abroad. The adolescents experience difficulties with the responsibilities left upon them when their mother left, as in new routines, taking care of younger siblings, and at the same time managing school. Among the grandmothers and adolescents there is a genuine understanding of the migrated family members sacrifice for their family’s survival and future. Even if it was difficult emotionally for the adolescents and children left behind, they were aware of the benefits and were grateful for remittances and they did not feel abandoned. Madianou & Miller (2011) mean that transnational families might have more financial stability but have to deal with the consequences of family separation. In our study the financial stability is expressed as more important for the respondents and makes a significant difference for the families’ future, that being together would be a bigger consequence than not being together. Practical difficulties that members in a transnational family experience can often be filled by other family members, material things or employees such as a housekeeper, as long as they have financial support.

Regular communication with the family member abroad is an important factor in transnational family life. The respondents state that, in any matter, they can communicate with their mother or daughter abroad, using cell phone or computer. This is an important strategy for the children left behind; when they miss their mother they can contact her and they feel as if she was there. The technological development has made it easier for the members to sustain the feelings of a “family”.

When women from the Philippines migrate for work they challenge traditional gender roles by becoming the breadwinner. At the same time fathers maintain in their role as a passive family member when it comes to household chores and caregiving, even if he is left behind with their children (Parreñas, 2005b). This study matches earlier findings that the fathers do not take over the traditional female tasks or involve in the childrearing. When the mother leaves to work abroad, her responsibilities in the family are instead transferred to another women in the family or extended kin, for example grandmothers, aunts or older sisters.

When making this study we experienced some cultural differences, but not that has come to affect our study in a negative way. Since we lived together with local people in the province for two month, we learned much more than only about
transnational families. We have established a deeper understanding of the Philippine culture and people, and been reflecting over our ways to think and presume in contrast to other ways. Spending time with the locals has also helped us understand the respondents better and given us knowledge about the Philippine society. Without this knowledge and understandings this study would have been hard to accomplish. Although, we do realize that our origin may have come to affect the outcomes of the study. The most interesting parts of the study have been all the meetings, being invited to the respondents’ homes and to listen to their life story. The research on grandmothers in transnational families is still deficient, and should be further examined. The perspective of grandmothers and other extended kin living in transnational families taking on the role as the caregiver for other children than their own is our recommendation for continued research.

References


