GLOBAL CHAINS OF CARE*

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ABSTRACT

Care giving is discussed within the framework of the global economy. Informed by Marx's theory of surplus value, the article subjects to rigorous analysis the case of a Pilipina who epitomizes an overseas worker from the South in search of economic gain. She leaves her own children in the care of a local housemaid whom she pays cheaply so that she can earn a salary that is higher than what she normally gets by taking care of a child in California, USA. If care giving is to be taken as a resource that is bought and sold in the market, who gains and who loses? The paper comes up with suggestions on how to lessen loses and maximize gains.

I feel profoundly pleased and honored to be here. Doubly so because I have long been a great admirer of Norway. As an American researcher of the problems of working parents, I have admired Norway's 35-hour workweek, its generous parental leave, its encouragement of fathers' participation at home, its Declaration of the Rights of Children. These things make Norway a model to the world in what a country can do to match its intelligence, its money, its ideals to the needs of its people.

You know this. But you should know that we non-Norwegians know this, too. In fact I not only know it, I may have crossed the line and become an open *evangelist* for the

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Norwegian way of life. At the Center for Working Families in Berkeley, California, we had a Norwegian visiting scholar last year, Lise Isaksen from the University of Bergen. One day, Lise heard me going on and on to some American students about the wondrous Norway and she gently scolded me, "Not ***everything*** in Norway is perfect." Okay, but the truth is scholars in the work-family field, like myself, do "utopian-ize" you. As Christians look to Jerusalem, as Marx looked to the dictatorship of the Proletarian, as mariners look to the North Star — so American work-family scholars look to Norway. Given that the US has the longest average workday in the industrial world, poor childcare, paid parental leaves of only six weeks, have no declara- tion of rights of children, I hope you don't mind if we use you to prod the wild elephant of the US in the right direction. But if reforms there fail, it may turn out that the sensible Americans will just want to immigrate to Norway. So if you suffer uncon- trollable waves of US immigrants, you can just write an indignant letter to the Center for Working Families. We've been drumming up business for you.

Today I would like to begin with an invitation to look at the world from the point of view of care. I begin with the premise that we are always in some kind of caring relaltionships. Like the natural world of animals and plants of which we are a part, our relationships have an *ecology* — including an ecology of empathy, and care.

The ecology of nature is amoral. One animal eats another and we say, "that's how it is." But for human beings, some care chains are humanly kinder and so more desirable than others. And we need to figure out how to make the good ones happen and the bad ones not.

On the face of it, this would seem like a fairly simple-minded invitation. Indeed, the term, "global chains of care" may call to

mind one of those UNESCO Christmas cards picturing along each side of the card a row of children in different costumes holding hands around the world. Or, it may remind some of you of a Disney World exhibit in Anaheim, California, in which you get in a little train that travels in a wide circle past an exhibit of various countries, each showing figures with different skin colors, different forms of dress, different houses, and in the background playing the song, "It's a Small World After All." *Both* the UNESCO Christmas card and Disney ride express a commonly shared, highly important *ideal.*

But clearly these images also filter out complexity, conflict, and inequity. So today, I want to look at the connections but hold onto the complexity. I hope to impart both a way of seeing the world and a possible warning about a troubling form of care chain that has not yet come to Norway, but that might.

Vicky Diaz

Let me begin with a story as told by Vicky Diaz, a woman born in the Philippines who works as a nanny caring for an American child. Vicky's account comes from a 1998 dissertation by Rhacel Parrenas, now a professor of Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin. Rhacel wrote her dissertation at Berkeley. I was a member of her dissertation committee, and worked with her on this research and I have been haunted by it ever since. Her dissertation will become a book, but my quotes here are from her 1998 dissertation and with her permission.

At the time Parrenas interviewed her, Vicky was a 34-year-old, college-educated mother of five. A former schoolteacher and travel agent in the Philipines, she migrated to the United States to work as a housekeeper and nanny to the two-year-old son, Tommy, of a wealthy family in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles. As Vicky explained:

> Even . . . now my children are trying to convince me to go home. The children were not angry when I left because they were still very young when I left them. My husband could not get angry either because he knew that this was the only way I could seriously help him raise our children, so that our children could be sent to school. I send them money every month.

She goes on:

> Even though it's paid well, you sink in the amount of your work. Even while you are ironing the clothes, they can still call you to the kitchen to wash the plates. It is also very depressing. The only thing you can do is give all your love *to the child [the two-year-old Tommy]. In my absence from my children, the most I could do with my situation is give all my love to that child.*

Paradoxically, Vicky got her job by telling her Los Angeles employer that she had experience raising children back in the Philippines. As she recounts: "I found out about the job in a newspaper and I called them and they asked me to come in for an interview. I was accepted after that. They just asked me if I knew how to take care of a child and I told them that I did because I had five children of my own. But come to think of it, I was not the one watching after them because I had a maid to do that." Actually, Vicky left her children with her husband, but she doesn't mention him here.

Other women Parrenas interviewed had similar stories. Carmen Ronquillo, a food service worker at Clark Airforce base in the Philippines couldn't find a good job after the base closed. So, like her sister before her, Carmen left her husband and two teenage children to take a job as a maid for an architect and single mother of two in Rome. As she explained to Parrenas:

> When coming here, I mentally surrendered myself and forced my pride away. I lost a lot of weight. I was not used to the work. You see, I have a maid in the Philippines that has worked for me since my daughter was born twenty-four years ago. She is still with me. I paid her 300 pesos before and now I pay her 1,000 pesos. [Speak-

> ing of her job in Rome] I am a little bit luckier than others because I run the entire household here.
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> My employer is a divorced woman who is an architect. She does not have time to run her household so I do all the shopping. I am the one budgeting, I am the one cooking [laughs] and I am the one cleaning too. She has a 24- and 26-year-old. . . they still live with her. I stay with them because I feel at home here.

How are the children doing back home, we may wonder? One mother said this: "When I saw my children, I thought, 'Oh children grow up even without their mother.' I left my youngest when she was *five.* She was already nine when I saw her again but she still wanted me to carry her [weeps]. That hurt me because it showed me that my children missed out a lot."

Another nanny said this:

> My children were very sad when I left them. My husband told me that when they came back home from the airport, my children could not touch their food and they wanted to cry. My son, whenever he writes me, always draws the head of Fido the dog with tears in his eyes. Whenever he goes to Mass on Sundays, he tells me that he misses me more because he sees his friends with their mothers. Then he comes home and cries. He says that he does not want his father to see him crying so he locks himself in his room.

I know these quotes are hard to hear. But I need to give you just one more to show that not only children but mothers suffer too:

> The first two years I felt like I was going crazy. I would catch myself gazing at nothing, thinking about my child. Every moment, every second of the day, I felt like I was thinking about my baby. My youngest, you have to understand, I left when he was only two months old . . . You know, whenever I receive a letter from my children, I cannot sleep. I cry. It's good that my job is more demanding at night.

Most migrating nannies remain very attached to their families at home, but they also become newly attached to the children

they care for in the U.S. They talk a great deal about going back to the Philippines, but most of them stay and it is the *money* they earn that goes back. The nannies themselves remain ambiguously between cultures, between families, in a stance of semi-permanent separation.

There is *nothing new* about one woman caring for the child of another and certainly nothing wrong about it either. What is new is the increased *global reach* of this story. Some care chains are short. A woman in a small Mexican village may leave her children in the care of an eldest daughter while she goes to the next biggest town for work. But more often nowadays, the care chains are long. They begin in a tiny village and end up in New York or Los Angeles.

Let me return to Vicky Diaz to say a word about the economics of her situation. The Beverly Hills family pays Vicky $400 a week. Vicky, in turn, pays her own family's live-in domestic worker back in the Philippines $40 a week. Pilipina domestic workers in Parrenas' study had averaged $176 a month — often as teachers, nurses and administrative and clerical workers back in the Philippines. But by cleaning houses and caring for children, they can earn $200 in *Singapore,* $410 a month in *Hong Kong,* $700 a month in *Italy* and $1400 a month in *Los Angeles.* So we have a stretch from $176 dollars a month (1674 Kroner a month) as a middle class professional in the Philippines to $1,400 dollars (12,600 Kroner) as a domestic servant or nanny in the United States — 8 times as much pay.

Third world women like Vicky Diaz need money. But they don't just want money. They want *security* in an increasingly insecure world. Some are single mothers. Some have abusive or unemployed husbands. Some come from countries — like Indonesia and Mexico — which have suffered great currency devaluations and business failures. Given these uncertainties, it

makes sense for a family to gain a foothold in *several* economies. If things go wrong in one, they get money from the other. As the migration expert Douglas Massey notes, the more globalization, the more insecurity, and the more insecurity, the more people migrate as insurance against insecurity. Globalization puts things on the move, and that includes mothers. Through the 1990's 55% of all immigrants out of the Philippines were *women.* And next to electronic manufacturing, the *remittances of these women* — the money they send back — make up *the* major source of *foreign currency* in the Philippines.

The Philippines is not alone. Other countries too are sending workers out to richer countries. The International Organisation for Migration estimates that, in 1994, 120 million people migrated — legally and illegally — from one country to another: In one year, this constituted 2 per cent of the world's population. According to Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, over the next twenty years we will see more migration and more migrants will be women. Already in 1996 *over half* of those who *legally* immigrated to the USA from a variety of countries were women, and their median age was twenty-nine. We don't know how many left children behind. But more of Parrenas' young female care workers were — like Vicky Diaz—young female immigrants too.

So this accounts for *the supply* of care workers. Now how about the *demand?* Because just as the supply is increasing, so is the demand. In the US, three trends increase the demand for care workers. First, more women do paid work. In 1950, *15* percent of American mothers of children aged six and under worked for pay. Today *65* percent of such women do. Indeed, American women now make up 45 percent of the American labor force. And such working women need good childcare. In the past, many working women turned to female relatives for help caring for their children. Today such relatives are taking

other, often better paid jobs. And women turn to paid carers from other races and nationalities.

Second, American workers are putting in longer hours. A recent report by the international labor organization, shows that between 1980 and 1997 the average number of work hours in the US has been rising — to what is now the highest number of hours in the industrial world—higher than in Japan. (In Norway, hours are going down).

And note, the problem is not just the number of hours, it's the inflexible design of careers, careers still designed for the man who himself barely exists anymore — the man with no responsibilities at home. Only today *women* too are fitting into a clockwork of male careers. And so the search is on for increasing amounts of care " further down" the global care chain.

And a third trend is at work now, too. In a period of economic boom, more Americans can *afford* to hire personal nannies. So a growing demand is there to fit the growing supply.

More and more Americans are grateful to find a good nanny for their children. And, at 10 times the pay, more nannies want the job. This fit of supply to demand also applies to jobs in rich countries tending the elderly, the disabled and the sick.

In the end, we have a female empathy chain — with men to the side of the picture. And who benefits? The rich country's couples benefit from the empathy of a Vicky Diaz from a poor country. But who benefits from the empathy of the professional woman in the rich country? Many do. But in the kind of multinational corporation I studied for my last book, *The Time Bind,* many women held jobs in the human side of the company — they were the welcoming voice, the soft touch. So at the top of the empathy chain, we might say, are the stock holds in large multinational companies.

Disclaimers

Now what am I saying here? Am I telling everyone to go home and sit in a chair? No. I'm not saying that. I am inviting us to look at the *complete* ecology of care. Who cares for the carer? And for the carer's children and elderly? Is that care *enough?* We need to ask that question when a babysitter's children are half way around the world. And of course we need to ask even when they are right next door. We need to ask not only who takes care of Vicky Diaz's children? Who takes care of Vicky Diaz herself? And who takes care of who takes care of her?

And when we find something painful in the picture, we need to ask why? Certainly the idea of a nine-year-old seeing her mother after 5 years and wanting to be carried like a baby, or the image of a child being sad to see other children at church with their mothers because it reminds him his mother is gone — certainly these are ominous images.

But I also don't see any easy villains in this story. The nannies are trying to survive, which is not a crime. Still, put together, seen as a chain, an ecology of empathy, we sense something amiss and we need to stop and understand why it is amiss.

Emotional "Surplus Value"

Let's consider Marx's idea of "surplus value." For Marx, surplus value is simply the difference between the value a laborer adds to the thing he makes (say, a car, a pair of blue jeans) and the money he gets for his work. He creates a value he isn't rewarded for. The capitalist skims off that 'surplus' value. Marx is getting us to see something painful, but also something *unfair.*

We can plainly feel the pain of the children and mothers. But is there something unfair going on for Vicky's children too? Something different than that which Marx described, but

something roughly analogous? A resource that should go to the *poor* person in fact goes to the *rich.*

- Only the resource isn't money. *It's* love.
- It isn't found at work. It is found at home.
- The legitimacy of the child's claim to this resource is not based on value created through work. It is based on the rights of a child to attention and care – as established in Norway's statement about the rights of children. The UN Declaration of the Rights of Children (which the US has not signed).*

The analogy — if we are not pushing it too far — leads us to compare wages to parental love. But *are* feelings a "resource" like money? In some ways, surely not. The more we love, the more we can love. So if love is a resource, it is an expandable, renewable resource.

At the same time, Vicky can't be in two places at the same time. She has only so many hours in the day. The more she gives love to Tommy, the less she gives her own five children. This is true too. And to put it plainly we should ask – are first world countries such as the US importing maternal love just as they have imported copper, zinc, gold and other ores from third world countries in the past? Since we are talking about a *service,* the copper and gold are, so to speak, themselves an active part of the expropriation.

In the end we need not reduce feelings to resources to see that feelings share certain features in common with other resources. In our own families we may see that a parent gives more love to one child, less to another. A parent may project all that is good onto one child, all that is bad onto another child,

* The Philippines is a signatory.

quite regardless of the actions of the children. So that even within one family, social class, race and country we may speak of the projectively rich and the projectively poor. Here too, there is a *deficit* and *surplus* of love.

Freud would note that a parent can *displace* emotion from one person to another. So a parent may *displace* the warm feelings they had toward a mother *onto* a daughter, or cold feelings they had for a brother onto a son. Certainly children sense this.

Similarly Vicky Diaz may be displacing feelings for one of her own child, Jose in the Philippines, *onto* the Los Angeles Tommy. And we may speak of Jose having a *deficit* of love, and Tommy a *surplus* of what has become, Parrenas, tells us, a global motherhood.

So *how* are we to *think* about this kind of care chain? One way is to say everyone should stay home. Let's have no care chain at all. Let each of us take care of only *our* family, our *own* community in our own nation. If we all tend our own primordial plots, everybody will be fine. Those primordialists are non-mixers, anti-globalists. To them, there is no such thing as a good care chain. Pilipina women, American women, all women they think should stay home and raise their own children.

For a second group, free market celebrants of globalization, care chains are inevitable and fine. This group accepts a free market economy uncritically. Let the demand meet the supply. If the primordialist thinks such care chains are bad because they're global, the free market celebrant thinks they're good because they're global. Either way, the issue of surplus love disappears.

For a third group, globalization is a mixed blessing at best. It opens out new opportunities — Vicky Diaz can earn good money — but also new problems — a nine-year-old child asks to be carried like a baby. For this group — let's call them critical

modernists – what matters is a global ***sense of ethics.*** If a person goes out to buy a pair of Nike shoes, she wants to know how low the wage and how long the hours were for the Third World factory worker who made the shoes. She applies the same understanding to a nanny's love of a child. We need not send the working woman home, lapse into primordialism, to sense that something is amiss for the nanny's children back in the Philippines.

So *what do we do?* I have no easy solutions. I do have suggestions. One solution might be to improve the Philippine economy so that Vicky doesn't have to immigrate to make a good salary. But even with such an obvious idea, we find the solution not so simple. According to the migration specialist Douglas Massey, surprisingly *under*development is not the cause of migration; *development* is. As Massey notes, "international migration . . . does not stem from a lack of economic development, but from development itself."

Another solution speaks to the observation that many nannies are fleeing abusive or abandoning men. Part of the solution then might be to create local women's shelters. Yet another solution is to encourage migrating nannies to *bring their children with them.* Or employers, or even government subsidies, could help them make frequent regular visits home.

A more basic solution is to *raise the value of caring work.* If we raised the value attached to caring work, care *wouldn't be such a 'pass on'* job in the first place. The low value placed on caring work is not due to the absence of a need for care, or to the simplicity or ease of the work. Rather, the declining value of childcare anywhere in the world can be compared to the declining value of basic food crops, relative to manufactured goods on the international market. Though clearly more necessary to life, crops such as wheat, rice, or cocoa fetch low and declining prices while

the prices of manufactured goods (relative to primary goods) continue to soar on the world market. Just as the market price of primary produce keeps the Third World low in the community of nations, so the low market value of care keeps the status of the women who do it — and, by association, all women — low.

A final basic solution to this problem, then I believe, is to *involve fathers* in caring for their children (surprise!). If fathers shared the care of children, worldwide, care would spread laterally instead of being passed down a social class ladder. I don't think this would mean men quitting work to raise children. Societies such as yours and mine will continue to need *well-paid, well-trained childcare workers.* If we want developed societies with women doctors, political leaders, teachers, bus drivers and computer programmers, we will need qualified people to help care for their children. And there is no reason why every society should not enjoy such loving paid childcare. It may even be true that in some fashion Vicky Diaz is the person to provide it. At the same time, we need to attend to the hidden losers in the care chain. Norway doesn't yet have its Vicky Diaz and may be it never will. But if it ever does, I am confident that the world will, once again, look to Norway to model the solutions.