

But the stories of Vicki, Geeta, and Saroj point toward another nightmare. In this one, there is no menacing policeman, no harsh jailer, no Big Brother. Indeed, the free-market exchanges go on with almost no government regulation—or help—at all. Instead of a paramilitary trooper breaking into one's home at night, there is the opposite sense of no one coming to one's aid in an hour of need. Indeed, in this nightmare, the government provides no fine schools, no well-equipped hospitals, no reliable police service, no beautiful parks, no safety-checked water or food, and no effective safety net. We face a world starved of public services, where helpless people make "free choices" between harrowing options. Many of us are poised to look for a Mack truck coming from the left where Big Bad Government is found, but the other big truck of unregulated capitalism is already approaching from the right, though the purr of its engine is hard to hear. The so-called free market—composed of international treaties governing the flow of goods, services, and people, and the flow of things and people itself—can be shaped by the policies of do-nothing governments in the Third, Second, and First Worlds. In this dystopia, a "structural tragedy," as the German sociologist Kai-Olaf Maiwald calls it, takes place.³⁷

Most migrant care workers want a government that neither oppresses nor abandons them and a world more equal than the one they have. But in the absence of a more positive alternative, Vicki, Geeta, and Saroj may say they are freely choosing to take part in the two-way global traffic, but what they really need is the freedom to choose between the world we have and a world that tends to the happiness of those on the backstage—a world that brings the backstage to the front.

ELEVEN Children Left Behind

WITH S. UMA DEVI AND LISE ISAKSEN

An increasing proportion of the earth's population—3.1 percent, or 214 million people—are migrants.¹ Nearly half of these migrants are women.² Of such women, an increasing number migrate not to reunite with their families but to seek jobs far from them.³ For many, these jobs are to care for the young, the elderly, the sick, or the disabled of the First World. Thus, many maids, nannies, eldercare workers, nurse's aides, nurses, and doctors leave their families and communities in the weak economies of the South to provide care to families and communities in the strong economies of the North. In such countries as the Philippines and Sri Lanka, female migrants outnumber male migrants, and many are young mothers. Once in the North, female migrants tend to stay longer than male migrants do. Just as poor countries suffer a brain drain as trained personnel move from the South to the North, so too they suffer a care drain.⁴

This drain occurs through a series of substitutions of one caregiver for another across the globe.⁵ Scholars who study women migrant workers often focus on the poor pay, long hours, and sexual exploitation they face in the North.⁶ Missing, until recently, has been much inquiry into their relationships with their children or other family and friends left behind. Without falling into maternalism (the idea that only biological mothers can care for children), without imposing northern middle-class cultural ideals on families of the South (presuming a nuclear family), and without being mistaken as an opponent of migration, we can inquire into the emotional costs of female migration.

Usually migrants' children are cared for by female relatives, husbands, other nannies, or boarding schools. Sometimes they are left in orphanages, as shown in Nilita Vachani's heartbreaking documentary *When Mother Comes Home for Christmas* about a divorced Sri Lankan mother of three who worked as a nanny in Greece.⁷ One out of four children in the Philippines has one or both parents working overseas, so this is no small matter.⁸

A 2006 UNICEF-UNDP (United Nations Development Project) field office survey of three states in Mexico—Zacatecas, Jalisco, and Michoacan—reported that a third of households with children in each state were without both father and mother.⁹ A 2003 study of domestic workers from Mexico and Central America working in California estimated that 40 to 50 percent left children behind, usually in the care of grandparents or aunts.¹⁰ Yet partly because mother-child bonds in particular are taken for granted, and partly because family problems are seen as private, these separations have remained until recently a hidden aspect of the backstage story.

In her pioneering work, Rhacel Parreñas focuses on both the Filipina migrating mother and the children she leaves behind.¹¹ Over half of Filipino migrants are women; their median age is 29 years, and they have on average 2.74 children who stay back in the Philippines. Building on Parreñas' work, I have suggested the term "global care chains"—the series of personal links, paid and unpaid, between people around the world.¹² A Sri Lankan nanny leaves her children in the care of her sister and a nanny in Colombo so that she can take up the paid care of twin

sons of an upper-middle-class couple in Los Angeles, the wife of whom gives, as a personnel officer, her own "care" to the human resources division of a multinational company. Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan's nanny has left her own youngest children in the care of a 15-year-old daughter, and her sickly mother in the care of a neighbor.¹³

Global care chains have long spanned great distances across regions, states, and even countries. Between 1850 and 1970, for example, thousands of women from rural Slovenia migrated to Egypt to take up work as domestic servants and wet nurses, leaving their own children behind. As one Catholic nun in the Saint Francis Asylum in Cairo, Egypt, observed:

We witnessed the sufferings of these young mothers on those Sunday afternoons, as they were giving their own body and milk to the child that was not their own, for the sake of their family. In spite of their suffering, they returned to Egypt as wet nurses after each baby, for they were well paid, and the family property was enlarged—but their suffering was too high. Let not this situation happen again, never more.¹⁴

So how can we understand such transfers of care? In "Global Care Chains: Critical Reflections and Lines of Inquiry," Nicola Yeates systematizes the idea of care chains, broadens the scope of its applicability, and adds to it a clearer picture of global labor networks.¹⁵ Here we extend Yeates' work by describing what *anchors* the care chains: the socio-emotional *commons*—a community of give and take of which any one person is a small part.

The term "commons" originally referred to the land on which eighteenth-century English villagers could freely graze their sheep and cattle, collect firewood, and hunt game. The land was shared—either because it was owned in common or was owned by a person who offered others the right to hunt, graze, and forage. Through a series of Enclosure Acts, the British Parliament privatized this land, preventing the commoners from using it.¹⁶ But the term "commons" has remained and has come to refer to other physical resources to which a wide community has free access—Internet data, the ocean, or nature preserves, for

example. It is not just physical resources that can be held in common; community itself is a form of emotional commons. Based on the principle of "generalized reciprocity," community means that each individual is poised to give to others, and each can expect to receive something from others—small favors in normal times or large favors in times of emergency. Just as public spaces can be placed off-limits to commoners, so too can access to social ties. In showing how care chains are anchored in such commons, and drawing upon S. Uma Devi's extensive research, Devi, Lise Isaksen, and I hope in this chapter to open a conversation about how to think about what is gained and lost.¹⁷

THE TABOO ON TALK ABOUT MIGRANT MOTHERS' CHILDREN

The hush and tension that accompany talk about migrants' children are themselves a clue that one has encroached upon a painful topic. One reason for the anxiety about this topic is surely the fact that the Third World state, the First World employer, and often the migrant herself clearly want this global arrangement to work. Given the huge financial incentives, workers badly want the jobs. At home in the Philippines, the domestic workers who migrated to the United States and Italy, interviewed by Rhacel Parreñas in the 1990s, had averaged \$176 a month as teachers, nurses, administrators, and clerical workers.¹⁸ By doing less skilled though no less difficult work as nannies, maids, and care-service workers, they earned \$200 a month in Singapore, \$410 a month in Hong Kong, \$700 a month in Italy, or \$1,400 a month in Los Angeles. The Sri Lankan Muslim maids studied by Michele Gamburd and Grete Brochmann migrated to pay for basic food and shelter.¹⁹ Most of the lower- to middle-class Filipina migrants studied by Parreñas, and the Kerala-born, Persian Gulf-based medical workers studied by Devi had migrated to pay for school fees, better housing, larger dowries, and more lavish weddings.²⁰

For their part, the spouse, the parents, and even the mason who builds her family's new house and the priest at the village temple who receives

her larger donations want migration to work because they benefit from it. Of course, the Third World governments also greatly gain from the influx of taxable hard-currency remittances (see chapter 10 for more on this). Indeed, many parties—the worker, her kin, her overseas employer, the businesses that arise to train, transport, and house her, and her local government—have a powerful vested interest in female migration.²¹

But as S. Uma Devi's research shows, there *is* a cost. Most of the migrant mothers she interviewed in Kerala, India, were proud to work overseas, but at the same time they felt sad to leave their children behind.²² Relatives, teachers, and child advocates also expressed concern about such children. Sometimes the government itself issues an alarm. As a 2004 report of the National Statistics Office of the Philippine government concluded, "The country faces huge social costs to migrant families as a result of prolonged separation, the breakdown of families and the deterioration and underdevelopment of the psycho-social growth of their children."²³

Devi's first discovery in her interviews with the kin of Kerala female migrant mothers was the taboo among the kin about discussing "how the children were doing." Mothers especially felt their departures to be a sensitive, private matter, not an expression of a larger public issue.²⁴ Many migrant mothers face accusations by neighbors back home of being a "bad mother" or a "materialistic person," and they themselves feel anguished at the long separations from their children.

One final obstacle faces those who write about the children left behind: fear of the misuse of their findings. Scholars who champion, as we do, the rights of migrants may also fear that any research illuminating the family problems of migrant workers could be used against them by nativists of the North. Although such fears are well founded, far more important is expanding our understanding of the hidden costs of female migration, both to advance our thinking and to influence global policy regarding the development of poor countries.

Given these obstacles, the small but important line of research now filling this gap is especially welcome. Early studies focused on the effect on children of departing fathers; recent studies point to the effect on children when both parents leave.²⁵ Kandel and Kao, for example, find

that the children of Mexican migrants earn better grades in high school and can, courtesy of their parents' remittances, better afford to attend college than the children of non-migrants. But, poignantly, they were less likely to want to.²⁶

Other studies focus on children's emotional well-being. In their survey of 709 Filipino elementary school children, average age 11 years, Battistella and Conaco compared the children who lived with both parents to those in "father absent," "mother absent," or "both absent" families.²⁷ Most children "show an understanding" for why their parents are sojourning abroad—to earn money for private education or a better house, for example.²⁸ But the children also viewed their parents' departure with "a sense of loneliness and sadness."²⁹ Compared with the children who had absent fathers, the children with absent mothers were also more likely to say they felt sad, angry, confused, and apathetic.

In one of the few in-depth studies of what she calls "parenting from afar," Leah Schmalzbauer studied 157 Hondurans, among whom were 34 transmigrant workers living in Chelsea, Massachusetts, twelve of their family members back in Honduras, and six others whose family ties had been severed. Both the migrant fathers and mothers, Schmalzbauer discovered, worried whether their children truly understood why they had left. In addition, she noted, "Dissension within transnational families is common. Some migrants completely cut themselves off from families back home."³⁰ In yet another study of the children of migrant workers, Rhacel Parreñas compared the children of Filipino male migrants and female migrants.³¹ When the husbands migrate, she discovered, the wives usually assume the role of both father and mother. However, when the *wives* migrate, most husbands stand aside from childrearing, leaving it to female relatives (grandmothers, aunts, or others). Some even take their wives' departure as a divorce and move to another village to find a different woman with whom to raise children. Parreñas sensibly calls for such husbands to take on the task of raising their children, just as the stay-in-the-Philippines wives do when the fathers of their children migrate.

In her book *Divided by Borders: Mexican Migrants and their Children*, Joanna Dreby documents the strong emotional strain that coexists with

an equally strong sense of family responsibility in migrant families. Young children often flouted the authority of their absent parents, turning for guidance to grandparents and other on-the-scene caregivers, even as they sometimes complained to their overseas parents that their caregivers were mispending the remittance money. The children told Dreby that they even missed being disciplined by their parents.³²

LEFT BEHIND CHILDREN IN KERALA

In 2003, Devi and her assistant Ramji interviewed 120 people, twenty-two of whom were working mothers from Kerala, a state in the southwest of India, who delivered health care in the United Arab Emirates.³³ Among these women were six doctors, ten nurses, five laboratory technicians, and one hospital cleaner. For each such migrant, Devi and Ramji averaged interviews with five family members back in Kerala, including children, spouses, parents-in-law, siblings, and other caretakers. Of the thirteen children under the age of 5 years, seven lived with both parents in the United Arab Emirates; one lived with the father and paternal grandmother back in Kerala; two lived with maternal grandparents and two with paternal grandparents; and one lived with another relative back in Kerala (not with the parents or grandparents). Of the nine adolescents, four attended boarding school in Kerala, and five lived with their fathers. Despite years of living apart with only occasional meetings, in no cases did migration sever relations between spouses.³⁴

Migration out of Kerala has become an accepted way of dealing with the discrepancy between its excellent schools and its struggling economy, which is unable to absorb its graduates. As one "solution" to this disparity, Kerala exports its educated workers. One out of every five working adults in Kerala is or has been a migrant worker.³⁵ Of such migrants, one out of every ten is a woman, and many of these are mothers. In the Devi study, migrant mothers averaged two children each, and they visited their children, on average, once each year for a month.

Mothers who migrated from Kerala often experienced a conflict, Devi found, between wanting to be a good mother and wanting to be a

financial heroine. By migrating, these mothers were defying the prevailing ideal of motherhood. To be sure, the idea of an "ideal mother" varies from one ethnic or religious group to another within Kerala. (Sixty percent of Keralans are Hindu, 20 percent Muslim, and 20 percent Christian.) Yet migrants from all these groups shared roughly the same vision of the ideal mother as a woman who lives with her children. She might work away from them during the day, but she returns to them in the evening.³⁶

Most Keralans favored the idea of a joint household, in which elderly parents live together with their sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren. A mother within the ideal joint family household is one who is physically present and the object of a child's primary attachment, but who gladly shares the emotional limelight with loving grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Both ideals—that of mother and family—persist in the popular imagination, but exist less and less in reality.

So Keralan mothers find themselves in a cultural cross-current of criticism and praise, disapproval (as being "heartless" and "materialistic") and approval (as being "heroically sacrificing" and "generously providing"). Though few mothers said they had been criticized to their face, all were highly aware of criticisms "going around." At the same time, given the high unemployment in Kerala, many well-trained, able-bodied Keralans from both the middle and working class yearned for the golden opportunity to migrate. Migrant mothers also felt that some negative gossip rose out of envy for the larger homes, more lavish weddings, larger dowries, and better schooling that their migration afforded them.

Despite their inner conflict of ideal mother versus financial success, the migrant mothers claimed that they did not feel alone because usually they were following a family plan. Still, when they spoke of their children in the interviews, Devi observed that most mothers teared up or openly wept. Even mothers who had long been reunited with their children recalled past separations with anguish. A number of nurses worked for hospitals in the Persian Gulf that had stringent pregnancy policies allowing only forty-five days' postpartum leave for the birth of

a worker's child. Thus, mothers would fly from the Persian Gulf back to Kerala, give birth to their babies, stay for forty days, then return to their full-time jobs back in the Gulf. Many would then work for a full year, or in a few cases, longer, before seeing their babies again.

Infants left by their mothers at the age of one month can develop a wide variety of alternative attachments to which this study cannot begin to do justice. But Devi was struck by some of the open statements by older children of migrant workers. For example, Priya, a Keralan college student and the daughter of a nurse practicing in the United Arab Emirates, said:

I want you to write about the human cost for people like us, to be apart for year after year. I'm living here in this hostel, and my classes are fine, but I can't talk to my mother. I can't tell her things. I can't see her face. I can't hug her. I can't help her. My mother misses me, too. My mother will retire at some point, but how old will I be then?³⁷

Leela, another daughter of a nurse working in the United Arab Emirates, lives with her father and brother in Kerala:

I cannot go home even for weekends because my father is alone at home and in a traditional setting I would not go and live with him, when he is alone. . . . You know you cannot discuss everything with your father. I wait for my mother's call every Friday, from the hostel phone. Also, I cannot talk freely with her, because the matron [a nun] is always hovering around. . . . My father is very strict, he has become more strict now and is very conservative . . . if I do anything non-conventional he tends to blame my mother for bringing me up the way she has, so I try to be very careful to see that my mother is not blamed. This is a big burden, which I would not have if she was here.³⁸

Many children spoke of envying friends who enjoyed the luxury of living with their mothers. When her mother left for a nursing job in the Gulf, Vijaya, now 20, took her mother's place in the household with her father and brother:

When I see my classmates accompanying their mothers to church or shopping, I miss my mother badly. . . . Actually I need my mother now

at this age. Anyway, later they would marry me off and I would miss the opportunity of living with my mother. I miss her.³⁹

When Vijaya's mother was interviewed in the United Arab Emirates, she asked, "How is my daughter? I know she misses me. [The family] call[s] me every day in the evening from the STD booth [an outdoor phone store, with a private booth]. She sometimes cries. I do too."⁴⁰

Even in their absence, migrant mothers became an emotional presence to their children. Mina, the 2-year-old daughter of a nurse in the United Arab Emirates, for example, daily looked at a blue dolphin toy hung in the center of the living room. Her paternal grandparents encouraged Mina to play with it, reminding her "your mommy sent the dolphin for your birthday." When it was decided to take a photo of Mina, her grandmother immediately dressed her in a frilly dress and brought her beaming into the living room. "Tell them who sent you this frock," the grandmother coaxed Mina. Mina, shyly looking down, held her grandmother by one hand and put her hand over her face as she replied in a whisper, "Ammachi" ("my mother" in Malayalam, the language of Kerala).⁴¹

The memory of the missing parent was not suppressed for these children, as can happen in the case of a bitter family rupture, a divorce, or a suicide. Nor was the mother's absence completely normalized, as in the case of the absent seafarer or soldier. Nor, again, was the role of mother fully absorbed by the grandmother or sister-in-law or father. Rather, a place was reserved in the child's heart for a mother who was not there.

At the same time, to varying degrees, children managed their private doubts about the arrangement. Why, the older children recalled asking themselves, did my mother leave me when the mothers of my school friends did not leave them? Did my mother have to leave, or did she want to? Or did she leave me because I was naughty? Answers to these questions seemed to differ depending on how a child imagined a parent's role as well as that of fathers, grandparents, friends, and others. But the more the child was exposed to friends whose mothers had not left, the more these questions arose. As one grown child of a migrant worker put it, "I wondered why she couldn't have stayed back or I couldn't have gone with her. I still wonder."⁴² She was managing doubt.

A few children, Devi found, had moved from doubt to distrust. They felt they had been promised a trustworthy bond with their mother that they did not have; they felt betrayed. This may correspond to what psychologists call "empathic rupture"—the breaking of an empathic connection. As a headmaster of a boarding school for children of migrant workers in Kerala said, "Most of the children we have in this school have parents working in the Middle East. The children we have here range in age from 5 to 16. Many of them have lost trust in adults. They are very independent, but not always in a healthy way. They distrust adults."⁴³ Each relationship between child and migrant mother, like that between any child and parent, is surely unique. Not all children of migrant workers are sent to boarding school, nor do most end up losing trust in adults, but the headmaster's comment points to an issue we know far too little about: the hidden price tag of global inequality.

The children left back in Kerala find themselves in an "emotional commons" in which there is a busy adult-to-adult exchange of favors, large and small, between kin, friends, neighbors, and teachers. This is governed by a complex web of understandings: grandparents care for a 4-year-old child, the migrant mother pays a builder to construct a house for a brother, and the brother and his wife stand ready to care for the grandparents in old age. The mother later finds a job in the United Arab Emirates for the brother's wife, so the favor exchange goes on.

So children ask themselves, "How do I fit in? Is the care I receive from my grandparents or aunts freely given as a gesture of love, or is it paying Mother a favor? Is this care offered out of commitment or desire, and in what measure each?" When the migrant mothers send gifts to "the household," are these gifts "payment" for the care? Or to what measure are they "purely" gifts?

Some children reported feeling "like a guest" in their caregiver's house. They tried to behave like little adults vis-à-vis their grandparents or aunts and uncles in the household so that they could "earn their keep," especially the older girls who tended to make themselves useful as little mothers to younger siblings.⁴⁴ In taking on the care of children—especially the very young—the migrant mothers' relatives often felt they were offering the migrant a gift far greater than any material return. So,

Devi discovered, both the migrant workers and their children felt beholden to the caregivers.

Removed from the day-to-day lives of their children, the migrant mother was forced to "materialize" love—to express through money and material gifts what she could not express through hugs. For the child, the arrival of a package of toys or electronic gadgets could mean "Mother is thinking of me" or "Mother knows what I like."⁴⁵ On the school playground in Kerala, a new toy often made a migrant's child at once a prince and object of pity, for it meant both that one's mother was absent but that one's family was relatively rich. The meaning that migrant parents meant to convey to their children through gifts was "I'm thinking about you, and I am devoted to you." But some children, Devi reports, interpreted such gifts as ways of saying "I'm sorry" or "Here is this gift instead of me."

Some children of absent parents continued to feel ambivalent about such gifts years after they had received them. For example, Divya, 26 years old, had grown up separated from both her parents who worked in the Gulf in order to accumulate a large dowry for her in the form of a "Gulf house." (The name given to large, upscale houses built with remittances.) Now well-married and raising her newborn son in this house, Divya has still never opened the small gifts that her parents sent her during their long absence. As she told Devi during the interview, "My parents sent me many glamorous pens and pencil boxes from the Middle East. But I never used them, even now, 20 years later."⁴⁶

Overall, the children of Kerala migrant workers faced many issues related to the departure of their mothers: the management of sadness at the lost company of one whose emotional centrality remained despite their absence, the envy of children with resident mothers, doubt about why a mother "had to" leave, an aversion to "being a burden" to relatives, and the task of figuring out the meaning of a material gift.

The migration of these mothers also led to shifts in the family system and the community beyond it. Although other research has uncovered stories of ruptured relations between wives and husbands, and even between parents and children, Devi came across no such stories in her Kerala interviews.⁴⁷ Nor did migration in Kerala divide the community

between the migrating rich and the non-migrating poor as it did in some places because most families at each occupational level had one migrant contributor to the family coffers. However, it did create cross-currents of envy (of the migrants' money) and criticism (of the migrants' motherliness) through communities of kin and family. It also unsettled the standing of children throughout the migratory system; for if the mothers of *some* children could leave, then *other* mothers might also leave as opportunities opened up. More importantly, migration stripped away the patterns of care that *would have taken place* between a woman and her child, her husband, her parents, her neighbors, her friends, and her temple had she not had to migrate: it raids the commons. S. Uma Devi's fieldwork opens a door into a world of hugely important and still largely unanswered questions.⁴⁸

TRANSFERRING CARE CAPITAL OR ERODING A CO-LIVING COMMONS?

The nurse who leaves her children in the care of relatives in Trivandrum, Kerala, while she cares for patients in Dubai on the Persian Gulf is part of a care chain. But how do we think about this? Should we understand a care chain as the transfer of "care capital"—simply the caring capacity—from one family and nation to another? Or is it best understood as an erosion of an emotional "commons"—or of a "life-world," to quote Jurgen Habermas—that is, a *care drain*?⁴⁹ Or is it a monification of bonds that nevertheless remain strong?

We can speak of migration as leading to a transfer of a migrant's care skills—her care capital—from South to North. But how is care like capital? Alejandro Portes sees social capital as "social chits," a series of favors that are owed or owing.⁵⁰ They differ from money in two ways. In a pure economic exchange, we borrow money, and we repay money—the *currency remains the same*. In the exchange of social chits, we give in one currency but repay in many others. In a pure economic exchange, if we borrow money, we pay it back at a *specified time*, but in the exchange of social chits, we leave open the time for repayment.

Between a migrant mother and her caregiving kin there is indeed an exchange of social chits. A favor is given (a relative cares for a child) and is eventually repaid (the mother pays various expenses and gives gifts). For example, the migrant health-worker Sujatha had asked her sister and her sister's stepdaughter Prithi to care for her 6-year-old daughter, Anitha, Devi reports.⁵¹ Sujatha sends money for Anitha's upkeep and education, and she pays for her sister's medical treatment and for Prithi's education; she also sends Prithi gold jewelry as gifts and sends checks to be put toward a *sari* or a computer, not "just money," to make the transfer more personal. Although Prithi is hoping that one day Sujatha will be able to find her a job in the United Arab Emirates, as Sujatha told Devi, "I know Prithi expects me to bring her over to Dubai, but if she comes, who would look after my daughter? So I don't want to help bring Prithi here now." In this case, receiving one chit prevented Sujatha from giving another.

Money was not in every instance depersonalizing, but in the exchange of favors, the simple keeping of company—dinners, birthday celebrations, daily conversation, and visual or physical contact—was lifted away from relations between family members. Children and caregivers alike tended to experience money as a substitute for shared experiences and love. Paradoxically, money for these cross-national caregivers came to loom large as a *symbol* of love, even as it also *commodified* love.

The accumulation of chits between Sujatha, her sister, and her sister's daughter Prithi implied a hidden inequity between Sujatha and the other player in the game: the employer in the North. Sujatha appeared to her employer as unencumbered by children: Prithi and Sujatha's daughter, half a world away, were invisible. But Prithi's caregiving is utterly necessary to liberate Sujatha for her fifty- or sixty-hour-a-week job. Were Sujatha to formally "hire" her sister's stepdaughter, it would be seen as necessary to add the cost of that childcare to the wages Sujatha is paid in Dubai. That cost might, in turn, lead to higher costs of services in the Middle East. But, given her child-free presentation of self, Sujatha cannot be compensated for the remote care of her daughter. The employer in Dubai never sees the care chain, the sacrifices, or the need to pay, so Sujatha is absorbing a cost that the Dubai employer ignores. The idea of "care capital" illuminates this inequity.

At the same time, thinking of these things as any kind of capital inhibits us from appreciating the *communal* world in which children and their chit-exchanging mothers live. And it hides a basic inequality in physical *access* to the integral *collectivity* that gives a social chit meaning in the first place. The idea of social capital leads us to imagine that social chits are individually owned and are independent of life in a community. It is as though a person could put a stack of bills (capital) in their private suitcase, get on a plane, and go. We are led to forget all the favors—the chits—that *would have been exchanged directly* and would have enriched the community had the person stayed.

As the social linguist George Lakoff argues in his book *Metaphors We Live By*, every metaphor implies a cognitive frame, itself based on a view of reality.⁵² Social capital is drawn from the same cognitive frame as material capital—money. It describes what a migrant mother or child *has*, not who she *is*, by participating in a social whole. If family and community are absent from the picture—that is, from the cognitive frame—we cannot see what is distorted, strained, or eroded by this Third World care drain. To put it another way, we cannot really see the effects of pollution on the ecology of the lake if we do not understand the concept of ecology, and think of each fish as an "on-your-own" fish. Similarly, we cannot fully understand the gift exchange if the only thing we can think to compare it to is a financial transaction. If we think of care as a form of capital, and we miss the idea of a rich, social ecology—an emotional commons—it is harder to see what migration subtracts from it.⁵³

As the economic anthropologist George Dalton notes, to apply market terms to the "non-market sectors of primitive and peasant economies is as distorting as it would be to use the concept of Christianity to analyze primitive religion."⁵⁴ As a belief system, animism may be just as complex as Christianity, but it rests on very different premises. In parallel fashion, we are fitting the wrong idea to the anguish of a migrating mother and the doubt, sadness, and envy of the child she leaves behind. Migration can "dis-embed" the informal exchange of favors and *turn them into* capital. But we cannot see how it does this if we start off by assuming that such favors are—and only are—expressions of capital.

Thinking about anything as "capital," we are led away from the idea of inalienability.⁵⁵

We often speak of the yawning monetary gap between haves and have-nots, but a person can have or not have far more things than money. What seems missing from the capital/market view is the opportunity to live as part of an integral whole family and community. One thing that helps create such a whole is being together, seeing one another, talking face to face, and physical touch.⁵⁶ Today we can talk by telephone or Skype, of course. But we envision this technology as tiding us over until we can see, touch, or hug one another.

Most ideas of community are anchored in reality, but some are based in fantasy. Many migrants forced off their land into the city, or out of their country into another country, look back with longing at a community of their dreams "back home." Indeed, many migrants wax lyrical about their hometowns back in Estonia, Tunisia, Uruguay, or the Ukraine. As whole villages have been emptied out by migration, the idea of an "imaginary" commons emerges to absorb a yearning for community. In Cinzia Solari's extensive research on Ukrainian "grandma nannies" who care for elderly people in a graying Italy, she discovered a number of nannies who remitted funds to construct grand houses; one jokingly called hers a "monument."⁵⁷

But no one lived in those houses. These vacant homes instead housed the nanny's fantasy of a three-generation family, in which the family all lives together—the grandparents, their children, and their grandchildren—a family she had dreamed of but never lived in as a young mother, given the cramped apartments available during the Soviet era. They dreamed of caring for their beloved grandchildren in this large house, while their daughters left in the morning to pursue professional careers like those they themselves had once pursued before they migrated. But alas, the young daughters of these grandma-caregivers led very different lives. Discouraged by the Ukrainian government from working, many were stay-at-home moms who were asking their migrant working mothers for money to buy apartments to accommodate their own nuclear families in the Ukraine.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, the spacious, empty, remittance-secured homes, the symbol of the older migrant mothers' dreams,

occupied the photos they would flip out of their wallets in Italy to show their employers, to say, "This is who I am."

Just as the market eroded the commons in eighteenth-century Europe, so too the market of the rich North is eroding the commons of the southern and eastern Europe today.⁵⁹ Looking at the growth of market capitalism in Europe, observers have noted that the market relied on and then, in a sense, used up the pre-existing non-market social ties based on trust and mutual commitment.⁶⁰ As Durkheim wrote, the idea of the contract was first based on a precontractual solidarity, confirmed by a gentleman's handshake or over the clink of two mugs of beer.⁶¹ To lend money, tools, or labor to a neighbor, a man relied on a culture of trust and the watchful eye of a stable community. From this original basis, contracts, courts, and jails were derived. Once more impersonal mechanisms were established, they tended to undercut the trust, rendering it irrelevant.⁶² Speaking of the effects of the market on nineteenth-century European society, Karl Polanyi noted,

A principle quite unfavorable to individual and general happiness was wreaking havoc with his [the worker's] social environment, his neighborhood, his standing in the community, his craft; in a word, with those relationships to nature and man in which his economic existence was formerly embedded. The Industrial Revolution was causing a social dislocation of stupendous proportions, and the problem of poverty was merely the economic aspect of this event.⁶³

For Durkheim and Polanyi, both society and market existed in the same place: Europe. But the relationship between them had changed over time—roughly from the 1800s to the 1900s. In the global migration of women today, the same process is taking place; only now the places are different, but the time period—the twenty-first century—is the same. Now the market of the North is indirectly eroding the social solidarities of the South and East, causing a care drain. Mothers are still mothers, but their children are forgetting what they look like. Mothers are making great sacrifices for their children, but the trust required to make those great sacrifices is sometimes undermined. Absent mothers leave for their children's sake, but the children are left with private doubts

about why their mothers left. Just as man's relationship to man and nature was "disembedded," in Polanyi's general term, so too, we suggest, migration can "disembed" relationships between parents and children. This effect occurs within the family, but by introducing the idea of a commons we can see the price paid in southern and eastern Europe for the services enjoyed by the North.

To be sure, migrants are choosing to migrate, but this is only true in the limited sense that eighteenth-century European peasants "chose" to seek jobs on the margins of the expanding cities of their day. The vast majority of the migrant mothers of Kerala, Thailand, and Latvia would far rather work at good jobs near home. Moreover, most migrants see themselves as using their remittances (drawn from the market) to better the lives of their families (part of the social commons). But over their heads, the powerful global market in service work—of which they form the core—is distorting and eroding that Third World commons. Indeed, as whole "sending" villages are emptied of their mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and daughters, it may not be too much to speak of a desertification of Second and Third World caregivers and the emotional commons they might have sustained.

In the end, the global care crisis raises concerns for both social theory and policy. For social theory, it highlights vital issues that market-derived concepts prevent us from grasping. For social policy, it raises the issue of what we can do to reduce the hidden injuries of the global gap between rich and poor. At the very least, we can call for arrangements by which children and perhaps other caregivers can follow mothers to their new places of work. We could also call for measures to be taken by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the North American Free Trade Agreement to reduce the economic gap that motivates much migration to begin with. But to solve a problem we first need to see it, and to see it we need the guidance of an idea.

TWELVE The Surrogate's Womb

At dusk one evening in January 2009, a Muslim call to prayer in the air, I walked around mud puddles along the ill-lit path through a village on the edge of Anand in the northwest state of Gujarat, India. Sari-clad women carrying pots on their heads, gaggles of skinny teenage boys, scurrying children, and elderly men shuffled along the jagged path past brick and tin-roofed shacks and mildew-stained concrete homes. Aditya Ghosh, a Mumbai-based journalist, was with me. We were here to visit the home of a commercial surrogate, 27-year-old Anjali, seven months along with a baby grown from the egg of a Canadian woman, fertilized by the sperm of her Canadian husband, and implanted in Anjali's womb at the Akanksha Infertility Clinic.¹ In several dormitories, the clinic houses the world's largest known gathering of commercial surrogates—women who carry to term the genetic babies of infertile couples living