

# Beyond family: Separation and reunification for young people negotiating transnational relationships

Global Studies of Childhood  
1–12

© The Author(s) 2022



Article reuse guidelines:

[sagepub.com/journals-permissions](http://sagepub.com/journals-permissions)

DOI: 10.1177/20436106211058897

[journals.sagepub.com/home/gsc](http://journals.sagepub.com/home/gsc)



**Jennifer E Shaw** 

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Thompson Rivers University, Canada

## Abstract

This paper explores perspectives on family reunification and emergent forms of separation among young migrants. These young people lived apart from and later reunited with their migrant parents who moved from the Philippines to Canada for work. I draw from 15 months of ethnographic, arts-based, and participatory research with ten participants living in Greater Vancouver. I demonstrate that while reunification literature and child rights discourse often focus on the process of a mother and child coming back together, this can obscure the relationships that young people form with others in the meantime. Cared for by grandmothers, aunts, or siblings, as well as becoming close to best friends, romantic partners, and confidantes, meant that the time these young people spent apart from mothers was utilized to cultivate vital connections to others. These connections were often quite painfully ruptured upon emigration, paradoxically turning “family reunification” into new separations. I explore how young people engaged in dual forms of relational work as they sought to foster a bond with their mothers while also maintaining—or grieving—connections with now-distanced loved ones in the Philippines. My findings, focused mainly on the emergent artistic and participatory methods, complicate family reunification discourse that stresses the importance of nuclear family bonds by calling into question who is family and who becomes family in a global economy that pulls such kindred apart. The young people I introduce speak creatively through poetry, story, and music to how familial separations are not resolved upon reunification but rather that reunification can give rise to new separations that navigated or even grieved in lesser-known ways.

## Keywords

childhood and youth, family reunification, participatory methods, transnational migration

---

## Corresponding author:

Jennifer E Shaw, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Thompson Rivers University, Faculty of Arts, 805 TRU Way, Kamloops, BC V2C 0C8, Canada.

Email: [jeshaw@tru.ca](mailto:jeshaw@tru.ca)

## **Introduction: Lives in transnational social fields**

Children live in a myriad of social relations that rupture, shift, and grow during transnational migration. Research in the Global South shows that young people with emigrant mothers are often raised by family members (Coe et al., 2011; Parreñas, 2005; Rae-Espinoza, 2011; Yarris, 2014). These studies on global division of domestic labor (Parreñas, 2015) centrally focus on kinship and care in the absence of mothers who work abroad (Olwig, 2007; Parreñas, 2005). In the Global North, childhood studies attend to the broader sociality of young people including their fraught and friendly peer relationships (Dyck, 2012; Holloway and Valentine, 2000; LaBennett, 2011; Thorne, 1993). Far less attention is paid to the broader social fields that young people in the Global South come to occupy during family separation. In addition to family members near and far, these young people forge friendships, romances, and other kinships in the absence of their parents. Young people's stories of their lives during time apart from their mothers demonstrates how and why they form relations within and beyond their "globalized families" (Olwig, 1999, 267). Young people's stories of fractures and sutures in their lives during times of family separation and reunification illustrate that these processes are never mutually exclusive or linear; rather, separated childhoods are negotiated through emergent relations that young people craft for themselves.

The research presented in this article shows that the prolonged time children spent away from their mothers affirms their social bonds to other carers, friends, and confidantes. Such bonds con-founded young people's experiences of migration when these attachments were ruptured in the name of familial reunification. This is not to say mothers were insignificant to children, but rather I draw attention to young people's perspectives on "reunification" to show how these moments of coming together were met with a sense that other relations were falling apart. The disjunctive experience of migrating reflects what Amit (2015) suggests about how "disjuncture in social relationships that punctuate everyday routines do so, more often than not, in quiet ways that usually do not attract attention beyond the particular individual they involve. . . regularly navigating the boundaries between associates and roles" (p.33). The stories I present illuminate a pattern I witnessed among young people as they quietly grieved the loss of friendships through music, poetry, and imagery.

In 2015 and 2016, I conducted a qualitative, youth-focused study with 10 young people who had recently moved from the Philippines to Greater Vancouver, Canada, to reunite with their migrant mothers. Their mothers came to Canada through what was the Live-in Caregiver Program. These young people spent 5–15 years apart from their mothers, often in the care of other female kin or caring for themselves as eldest children. I sought to develop a youth-engaged ethnographic methodology that employed dynamic modes of storytelling, visual methods, and a participatory photography project. I engaged parents in informed consent process while being mindful—first and foremost—of young people's interest in participating to the degree they were available for and comfortable with meeting me (Shaw, 2018). My experiences as a youth worker led me to understand that those with whom I might work are often busy with employment, school, and family obligations; thus, I knew the project needed both flexibility and structure so participants could more openly contribute and create while also knowing what to expect during the study. I anticipated that the more organized research events would enable us to build rapport and open the door to less structured participatory activities. I sought young people's consent initially and routinely checked for on-going consent. I maintained participants' privacy by using pseudonyms and obscuring other parts of their identities. The creative and participatory aspects of the research enabled participants to engage with the project largely on their own terms and seemed to genuinely be an enjoyable part of our time together, especially when they received the participatory photography book that we made together.

Qualitative research with migrant and refugee young people often focuses on the limits and possibilities of engaged and creative methods such as participatory, arts-based, and story-based approaches (Clark, 2011; Nunn, 2020). According to Karen Fog Olwig (2007), life stories have the potential to reveal a person's geography and relationality as memories surface and are saliently tied to places and people. Writing about Asian North American identities, Ty and Goellnicht (2004) argue that people narrate their identities following transnational migrations in ways that extend beyond imagined homelands and hyphenation. Additionally, I learned that these stories also extend beyond familial separation and reunification. Ty and Goellnicht (2004) argue that there "are the complexities, the struggles and layering of various facets of one's identity, which are shaped by the history and the politics of one's imaginary and adopted homeland(s), as well as the importance of memory, myth, and art in the construction of self" (p.2). Thus, expressing oneself through words or art can be a political project of situating the self in the world, illustrating rejections, and assertions of belonging in unexpected ways.

Nunn (2020) finds that among refugee young people, participatory and arts-based research not only has the potential to reveal where children feel they belong but the research itself can become a place of belonging. Through a song created by one of her participants, Nunn comes to understand how "affective, embodied experience of coming together across languages, cultures, and histories, to create and collaborate, learn and share" in research cultivates new spaces of belonging (p.2). She suggests that arts-based participatory projects can become "expectational spheres of belonging," especially when participants can correct and elaborate on representations of their lives on their own terms (p.12). This observation reveals an alternative to the adult-child power dynamic in an interview setting, one that geographer Pratt (2010) found resulted in "transcripts [that] seemed thinner than most" (p.343) among her young Filipina/o participants. While I conducted interviews early on, it became clear to me that these events were primarily a means to build trust between myself and participants as they revealed so much more about who they loved and what they have lost in entirely unexpected ways.

It was through less structured and more creative modalities that these participants drew my attention to relationships beyond immediate family members. While their mothers often centered prominently in my participants' migration stories, the time surrounding their reunification in Canada was met with grievous shifts away from their closest confidantes: their friends, bandmates, classmates, as well as boyfriends and girlfriends. I present these emergent findings to challenge conventional questions about reunification and "family" as a bounded and natural unit of children's social lives as well as to illuminate their social fields otherwise.

Sociologist Bourdieu (1984) theorizes social fields to be the arrangement of social forces into self-contained fields. These fields are relatively coherent, with each member sharing an understanding of their roles and responsibilities even as a field changes (Dyck, 2012). Olwig (1999) applies field theory to kinship among transnational Caribbean families when she states that "children constitute an important linchpin in the global networks of family relations which tie migrants and relatives at the point of origin together into coherent social fields of relations" (p.267). Mutual investment in children's care can bind kindred in a transnational social field. Yet, "family" is often not the totality of a young person's social field. Research shows that young people in the Global North forge relations with peers, friends, classmates, and teammates in ways that are vital to their sense of place and identity (Dyck, 2012; LaBennett, 2011; Thorne, 1993). This dynamic sociality has yet to be explored among those who await family reunification in their countries of origin, likely because "the family" figures so prominently in studies of parental labor migration. While such scholarship seeks to attend to how children are active and not just passive in the migration process, there is still an assumption that their social fields are first and foremost family centered.

This is despite how their sense of “family” is challenged in a global labor market that makes cohabitation and senses of kinship with parents difficult to maintain.

Next, I explore how coming together in name of family reunification becomes another kind of coming apart for young people whose lives straddle different times, places, and people. I problematize the notion that family separation is preceded by family reunification as a linear, logical sequence of events. Rather, by focusing on young people’s creative modes of storytelling I demonstrate how the simultaneity of moving together (to be with parents) *and* apart (from friends and other family members) represent a paradoxical disjuncture in young people’s social fields that extend much beyond the nuclear family.

## Family reunification and those left behind

According to the United Nations’ Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR, 2005), family reunification “refers to the situation where family members join another member of the family who is already living and working in another country in a regular situation” (p.1). The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2016) plainly states the importance placed on family reunification as “one of the pathways with the greatest potential to contribute to regular and orderly migration” (p.2). In other words, government-orchestrated reunification channels can prevent irregular migration, which might otherwise be considered *disorderly* forms of mobility. The IOM (2016) suggests that family separation can lead to a “range of psychological, social and other adverse repercussions,” especially for children who live away from a parent (p.1). The IOM further emphasizes the importance of maintaining “the integrity of family units” (IOM, 2016) that are usually considered to be “all members of the immediate family (spouses, parents, and dependent children)” (United Nations, 2005: 1–2). This discourse not only reifies the nuclear family as the ideal social unit, but also takes biologism as the normative indicator of kinship rather broader understandings of relatedness as biological and non-biological (Carsten, 2011).

Emphasizing the importance of the nuclear family, researchers are attentive to the ramifications of parent-child separation when parents engage in labor abroad. These studies often reflect cost-benefit analyses of parent-child separation without questioning the constructed nature of kinship and the dynamic ways kinship is practiced and altered across cultural contexts and during the life course. In this literature, it is often agreed that remittances can help families cope with economic precarity by enabling family members to purchase household goods, secure land and better housing, invest in microbusiness, and support children’s education (Asis and Ruiz-Marave, 2013; Basa et al., 2011; Eversole and Johnson, 2014; Fujii, 2015; Porio, 2007). Yet, these researchers argue that children endure psychosocial consequences as they grow up without one or both parents; parental emigration can provoke unhappiness, loneliness, social isolation, and poor guardianship (Graham and Jordan, 2011). In addition, families experiencing maternal migration must contend with the stigma associated with having a mother away since mothers are ideologically positioned as essential to children’s proper rearing and well-being in many patriarchal societies. This maternal discourse is particularly prevalent among Catholic families in or from the Philippines and who are central to my research study (Parreñas, 2005).

Studies that emphasize the potential gains of remittances or perceived losses of care amid transnational separation often take several aspects of kinship and migration for granted. Three problematic assumptions about family reunification arise in conventional migration policy and scholarship arenas: first, that migration is dichotomous and linear, characterized by “separation” on the one end and “reunification” on the other; second, that parents constitute the most significant social relationships for children and that family is their main social field; and third, that attaining a cohabitating nuclear family is and should be the ultimate goal in meeting children’s needs. By placing these

assumptions in conversation with how young people navigate time apart from parents, those interested in separated childhoods can better understand how reunification discourses work to paradoxically propel and deny certain kinds of social arrangements for children.

Next, I explore the stories of two 17-year-olds named Rodel and Vea.<sup>1</sup> Their narratives juxtapose their social lives in the Philippines with their initial and later experiences in Canada. While their stories are specific to their individual experiences, they reflect a common narrative among all the participants that coming to Canada implied a significant sense of departure from a familiar life and people in the Philippines. Their stories reveal how joining mothers was quickly overshadowed by the despair of what they felt they lost unjustly in the process of leaving the Philippines. These two stories tell us how the goal of reunifying with their mothers and recreating their nuclear families was punctuated by much more than a reuniting of a divided whole; rather, young people's complex social fields exist far beyond their parents and present lives in Canada.

### **Disjunctures: “I miss everything about you”**

Rodel, one of the few boys in my study, seemed to be most at ease when we talked about music. I learned of his passion when we were walking around his school one day and discussing what he liked to do with his friends. He told me about the alt-rock band in which he used to play when he lived in the Philippines. His band was inspired by the music of Nirvana and Green Day, and he would play an imaginary guitar to mimic the deep distortion that characterized these bands' grungy and punky sounds. I could see his relief when I told him that I knew of this music well. “Really?” he said, “It's so trashy for some people but we really like it. . . It's how we express ourselves.”

Vea also loved playing music. I did not know about her interest in music and guitar until our third interview. As we looked her photographs of her guitar, tears crept into the corners of her eyes. This conversation arose bittersweet memories of those she loved who were now far away and the time she felt she was losing with them since reuniting with her mother in Canada. She had spent most of her life away from her mother who worked overseas for all but a few weeks of Vea's life. Although Vea was glad to finally get to know her mother, she felt disconnected from all those who raised her and knew her back in the Philippines. Like most times, talking with her revealed her ambivalent emotions about her migration, and music was a space where she sought to express these tensions and uncertainties.

Vea arrived in Canada less than a year before I met her and was on the cusp of finishing high school, although she had already started college in the Philippines prior to leaving. Her initial excitement in Canada had passed and she was starting to doubt the optimism she initially held. Now that she was back in high school, working part time, and preparing her college applications, the future seemed murky. This uncertainty appeared to be chipping away at her as she became increasingly pessimistic as her graduation approached. The little time she spent with her busily working parents was also disappointing, and most of the time she was lonely. She missed the bustle of auntie's house and the closeness of her friends in the Philippines.

Music was something that had brought Vea's family together. “When I was in the Philippines,” she explained, “I used to play with my sister even though we didn't sing well. It was so fun.” With her sister living in the Middle East and recently denied a visa to visit Canada, Vea clung to these memories of their time together. She expressed how “I bonded with my sister and it just brings back memories. . .” Her stories about playing the guitar quickly shifted into mourning her relationship with her sister: “And I so miss the times when we played the guitar together, when we don't care whoever hears it and then here comes my aunt and we sing altogether. And then if *Kuya* [my cousin] is home, . . . he can come with us. We just sing along and then we're so happy. I just felt so happy. Guitar is one of the things that I love. I used to play it a lot. So, it's one representation of me.”

For Rodel, music was also representative of his closest relationships and a deeply emotional connection he had to his late father who passed away several years ago. Rodel's father taught him to play the guitar. Regardless from the stigma surrounding loud, heavy music in his predominantly Catholic community, he found solace in music during those most difficult years leading up to and following his father's death. Rodel's mother left the Philippines several years earlier to work first in a neighboring country and then in Canada performing domestic labor. In the absence of his mother, Rodel cared for his father in his final days and continued to live in the house alone after his younger siblings went to live with relatives. Rodel kept playing music and found himself spending more time with his bandmates who became as close as family.

Later, we were talking more about music and his friendships, yet he seemed to have a hard time telling me precisely what his friends and music meant to him. He then excitedly played me a song from his crackly smartphone speakers—"It's Sponge Cola, a Filipino band." He explained how the vocalist was singing in Tagalog about his bandmates and their friendships, identifying them as his *barkada*. Writers of Filipino male friendship discuss the significance of *barkadas* or groups of friends that bond early in life, sometimes referring to themselves as a "gang" (Andres, 1989; Dumont, 1993). *Barcada*, which means boat in Spanish, has particular gender and class connotations in the Philippines. Dumont (1993) notes that during the 1950s it was common for criminally convicted men to be shipped via boat to other parts of the Philippines for imprisonment. These men, Dumont says, would grow close during their transportation, becoming a *barkada* that would continue their friendships even upon their release from prison. The term spread into popular culture and was taken up to identify youth cultures, especially among young Filipino men, signifying a relationship that is "usually indestructible for it is based on pure and genuine friendship" (Andres, 1989: 156).

I asked Rodel if the Sponge Cola song related to his feelings about migrating, as he referenced the different paths taken by the men. He responded, "Yeah, it relates because whenever I listen to it, I want to go back. I want to sing the song again together with them," referring to his friends and bandmates. As part of the multimodal and participatory research process, Rodel wrote a song that spoke to these friendships. One of his songs goes partly as follows:

Photos of laughter, Memories of a friend  
 You'll always be my brother, until the end  
 And no matter how far it is  
 I'll never give up on us  
 And no matter how hard it may seem  
 I'm sure it won't last  
 Still misses everything about it  
 The view of the place, the air we used to breathe  
 The places we used to go, the people we used to know  
 And misses everything about it still  
 After all nothing could change what family means to me  
 Nothing could change what you really mean to me  
 And I thank you for everything  
 Despite the distance and times changing  
 I thank you for being an idiot



and my buddy in many ways  
I thank you for being there for me  
In my ups and darkest days  
I thank you for being a friend  
And I love you always

While music helped Rodel forge friendships and even new kinships in the Philippines, the courage to play music in Canada seemed to be an obstacle for Vea who refused to share her talent with her peers. She often felt invisible at school and worried her classmates would judge her if she dared to play her guitar. Having been in the same classes as her peers for almost a year, she was astonished when her teacher would call out Vea's name, followed by whispers from classmates: "Who's Vea?" She felt invisible among her peers. Without peer recognition and the opportunity to play music she did not quite feel like herself in Canadian school: "I'm a very sociable person back in the Philippines. I just don't know what happened to me here." She described herself as more outgoing in the Philippines, noisy and at times narrowly escaping getting in trouble for talking too much in class.

She had reluctantly made a few new friends in her Canadian school, but no one with whom she felt she could really be herself. As Vea struggled to form new friendships, she felt her friends in the Philippines start to drift away. Using the metaphor of a tree losing its leaves in the autumn, she photographed a maple tree with bright orange and red leaves just before they dropped for the winter. Reflecting on the meaning of this image she wrote about how her relationships in the Philippines were withering:

Seasons change. Same with people. . . Experiencing loneliness, hopelessness, and despair of the seasons, I also get to experience the happiness it brings. Even though I experience the feeling of being forgotten by friends that I care so dearly, or fear that I am always left out, or even feel that they have established their own lives and that I am not a part of it, it is still good to know that after all of this struggles, I can be stronger and more mature enough to build a life where I can have people around me again. You cannot expect that people you care about will stay by your side forever.

Just before she moved to Canada, Vea lived with her best friend in the Philippines. Despite knowing that she would soon leave the country, Vea desperately wanted the experience of starting university and living on her own. She and her closest friend moved into the university dormitory a couple of hours away from her family home. Reflecting on this time, she reminisced about their independence and cravings for late-night fast food. She then reflected on how their relationship changed: "She's crazy. She's doing everything for us to be connected in some ways. She applies for a phone plan. [But] me—I don't even call her! No, not really. Well, that makes me feel bad!" Vea and her best friend were not talking as frequently as they used to and Vea felt responsible for that even though it was not intentional. She also imagined that her other friends in the Philippines were moving on in life without her. "My other friends—I don't know," Vea pondered,

I'm just curious and kind of worried too because it's like I'm not alone here but then they spend time together for several months without me and then it makes their bond stronger, whereas for me it kind of drifted away. I'm worried if I go back to the Philippines what if the bond between me and my friends has already disappeared and it's gone? I hope they still remember me when I get back home.

Vea mourned the connections that used to mean so much to her. Rodel was similarly missing his bandmates. In addition to leaving these closest friendships, what seemed most difficult for Rodel

was saying good-bye to his girlfriend. During his time living alone in the Philippines, he grew close with his girlfriend. She occupied much of his thoughts, which he also poured into his song-writing. As part of the research project and in dedication to her, he wrote her a song entitled “Pieces of me and pieces of you”:

As I open up my eyes I see you there  
 Asking why you have to go away  
 And I’m staring at the ceiling in the darkness of my room  
 Wondering why you’re so far away  
 I know we’re miles apart  
 and your love is all that I had  
 As I turn out the lights off into my room  
 Thinking about me being with you  
 And my heart is torn into  
 Pieces of me and pieces of you

Rodel’s life was punctuated by absences and ruptured relationships: first with his mother leaving and then with his father passing away. These events were followed by the rupture of relationships with his bandmates and closest friends, and moving far away from his girlfriend whose memory now reflected a painful absence in his current life. It was this latter piece about his girlfriend that he spoke of the least to me, but I could tell through our other interactions that she was always in on his mind through his music. It was as if speaking about her was so hard and too painful to articulate because he missed her the most. Music was his means to communicate as he sang to her and for her. Anthropologist Stevenson (2014) writes about song as forms of care, mourning, and recalling. She argues that song offers “a particular kind of attention” (p.157) toward someone, attending to their absence by calling them back into existence. She goes on to say that “song [is] an invocation that depends less on words per se and more on voice as a kind of gesture” (Stevenson, 2014). While Rodel’s lyrics are emotive and affectual, his acts of writing for his friends and his girlfriend were gestures toward momentarily reuniting with them—singing them into his existence, even just for that moment when words were uttered and the melody was made. It was his means to not be apart from his loved ones through the creative, agentive act of invoking those who were now so far away. Veia had a harder time invoking her loved ones, hesitating to gesture toward them as she sunk deeper into her sense of loneliness.

Rodel’s relationship to music had changed since he arrived in Canada to reunite with his mother. His guitar, given to him by his late father, was one of his most prized possessions. Rodel sadly had to leave it behind because it was too costly to transport to Canada. He lamented how hard it was to access that part of himself—the lyrics and song that invoked his friends and family. Rodel wanted to start a band with kids his age, but he told me that his mother was making this difficult. Although Rodel was glad to reconcile with her, he felt that she was “overprotective” due to her worry that he would hang out with “bad guys.” He thought that his mother’s concerns were too controlling “because I’ve never been that protected before because I just did other things that I’d like to do and no one would tell me what to do.” He likened his current situation to a “squeeze” and at times reminisced about returning to the Philippines where he had “the freedom of what I want to do.” He mostly played his acoustic guitar alone in his room, sometimes uploading his songs to his social media. He explained, “It helps me express how I feel. When I’m happy, when I’m upset, I play.” He went on: “music is important because it helps you escape the craziness of life.”



When young people are placed at center of research and invited to share their concerns, they may importantly confound notions of separation and reunification in the migration process. Paying close attention to young people's perspectives about the breadth of their social lives and the configurations of their youthful subjectivities, LaBennett (2011: 25) suggests, may involve what is otherwise ill-attended to in adult-centric research. This includes how young people forge relations of self-express, care, and even love among their peers and confidantes when their nuclear families are pulled apart or when kinship feels challenging. These emergent themes not only reveal the complexity of transnational young people's social lives but also the pains of displacement beyond the nuclear family. In other words, youthful subjectivities are crafted in social fields that are not bound to family nor that depend solely on family reunification, but that foster kindred among peers in the disjuncture of parental emigration. Considering the phenomenon of separated childhoods from the perspective youthful subjectivities must necessarily consider whom these young people feel connected to and apart from in their migratory journeys and beyond-family social fields.

### **Conclusion: Coming together while falling apart**

While family reunification was important to my participants, their stories reveal more nuances in how they navigated their mothers' absence amid the constellation of many carers and confidantes that made their social fields. Rodel listened to his favorite alt-rock bands and songs that reminded him of those he considered family the Philippines. Vea felt unlike herself in her Canadian school and thought that her closest relationships were quickly disappearing due to distance. All of the participants I met similarly expressed love for their mothers, but none of them felt exceptionally close to nor understood by their parents—a consequence of family separation in the global labor market that simultaneously adheres to the convention of the nuclear family yet makes such configurations hard to fulfill. These young people and others I met in the course of this study had much more say about their lives beyond family, or beyond the social field of what reunification discourse suggests. Their migration journeys were thus composed of many simultaneous kinds of coming together and moving apart that draw attention to complex socialities that extend beyond the aims of family reunification.

Scholars working at the intersection of migration studies and childhood studies often argue that young people must be seen as much more than passive recipients of parents' migration decisions and as more than luggage that merely accompany migrating adults (Orellana et al., 2001). Arguably, children are active agents in their migration journeys, shaping their parents' migration timing, encountering their own processes of integration, and differently experiencing citizenship and senses of belonging (Coe et al., 2011; Pratt, 2012). While this work highlights children's perspectives about their transnational familial journeys, there is an imperative to also not subsume all of their experiences within the realm of "family." Rather, illuminating how children craft and carve social fields beyond family paints a different image of what constitutes separated childhoods *for children*.

Examining how children not only grieve lost time with their mothers but also grieve other relations upon family reunification has implications for policy and practice. These implications include understanding how immigration policies and delays affect young people, how young migrants forge friendships upon immigration, how they experience education in Canada, and what could assist them in finding people and opportunities that help them maintain their existing friendships while fostering new ones. This is particularly pertinent in receiving countries like Canada where young Filipina/o's compounded experiences of dislocation and misrecognition challenge their educational experiences, career trajectories, and social lives (Catungal, 2012; Farrales, 2017; Mendoza, 2012).

Just as song could allow Rodell and Veal to offer an innovation to their distant loved ones and gesture toward them, perhaps their stories encourage readers to listen carefully to what they say and even sing, maybe responding through the gesture of a more meaningful recognition of who these young people love and what they grieve in a global labor market that makes kinship not a natural occurrence, but hard to sustain. This suggests is not that young people should stay in their homelands or never reunite with parents abroad, but rather that the prolonged time families spend apart engenders multiple heartaches by perpetuating the dominant assumption that children are best reared by their parents yet denying children and parents the ability to be together. Attention to how young people cope with familial separation through peer relationships reveals their creative responses to parental migration and how they build their own social worlds. Their stories, songs, and poetry thus help to illuminate separated childhoods as they are experienced beyond family.

### Acknowledgements

I appreciate the participants of this study who were generous not only with their time but with their expressions and creations. I strive to do justice with your words and hopes. I am grateful to Professors Parin Dossa, Noel Dyck, Kathleen Millar, and many other colleagues and friends for their exceptional guidance and encouragement throughout this work. I am also thankful for the constructive comments of the anonymous reviewers and the support of this special issue editor. This research was generously funded through a Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship and with support from Simon Fraser University.

### Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

### ORCID iD

Jennifer E Shaw  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9679-1414>

### Note

1. Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

### References

- Amit V Ed(2015) *Thinking Through Sociology: An Anthropological Interrogation of Key Concept*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Andres TD (1989) *Positive Filipino Values*. Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers.
- Asis MM and Ruiz-Marave C (2013) Leaving a legacy: Parental migration and school outcomes among young children in the Philippines. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 22(3): 349–376.
- Basa C, Harcourt W and Zarro A (2011) Remittances and transnational families in Italy and the Philippines: Breaking the global care chain. *Gender and Development* 19(1): 11–22.
- Bourdieu P (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Carsten J (2011) “Substance and relationality: Blood in contexts. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40(1): 19–35.
- Catungal JP (2012) Scales of violence from the body to the Globe: Slain Filipino youth in Canadian cities. In: Coloma RS, McElhinny B, Tungohan E, et al. (eds) *Filipinos in Canada: Disturbing Invisibility*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, pp.321–340.
- Clark CD (2011) *In a Younger Voice: Doing Child-Centered Qualitative Research: Doing Child-Centered Qualitative Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Coe C, Reynolds RR, Boehm DA, et al. (eds) (2011) *Everyday Ruptures: Children, Youth, and Migration in Global Perspective*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt.
- Dumont JP (1993) The Visayan male “Barkada”: Manly behavior and male identity on a Philippine island. *Philippine Studies* 41(4): 401–436.
- Dyck N (2012) *Fields of Play: An Ethnography of Children’s Sports*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, Higher Education Division.
- Eversole R and Johnson M (2014) Migrant remittances and household development: An anthropological analysis. *Development Studies Research* 1(1): 1–15.
- Farrales M (2017) Delayed, deferred and dropped out: Geographies of Filipino-Canadian high school students. *Children’s Geographies* 15(2): 207–223.
- Fujii T (2015) Impact of international remittances on schooling in the Philippines: Does the relationship to the household head matter? *Asian Economic Journal* 29(3): 265–284.
- Graham E and Jordan LP (2011) Migrant parents and the psychological well-being of left-behind children in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 73(4): 763–787.
- Holloway SL and Valentine G (2000) *Children’s Geographies: Playing, Living, Learning*. London: Routledge.
- International Organization for Migration (2016) *Family reunification* (global impact thematic paper). Available at: [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our\\_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Family-reunification.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Family-reunification.pdf) (accessed 1 June 2021).
- LaBennett O (2011) *She’s Mad Real: Popular Culture and West Indian Girls in Brooklyn*. New York: NYU Press.
- Mendoza M (2012) Educated minorities: The experiences of Filipino Canadian university students. In: Coloma RS, McElhinny B, Tungohan E, et al. (eds) *Filipinos in Canada: Disturbing Invisibility*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, pp.360–381.
- Nunn C (2020) The participatory arts-based research project as an exceptional sphere of belonging. *Qualitative Research* 1–18. DOI: 10.1177/1468794120980971
- Olwig KF (1999) Narratives of the children left behind: Home and identity in globalised Caribbean families. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25(2): 267–284.
- Olwig KF (2007) *Caribbean Journeys: An Ethnography of Migration and Home in Three Family Networks*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Orellana MF, Thorne B, Chee A, et al. (2001) Transnational childhoods: The participation of children in processes of family migration. *Social Problems* 48(4): 572–591.
- Parreñas RS (2005) *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Parreñas RS (2015) *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work*, 2nd edn. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Porio E (2007) Global householding, gender, and Filipino migration: A preliminary review. *Philippine Studies* 55(2): 211–242.
- Pratt G (2010) Listening for spaces of ordinariness: Filipino-Canadian youths’ transnational lives. *Children’s Geographies* 8(4): 343–352.
- Pratt G (2012) *Families Apart: Migrant Mothers and the Conflicts of Labor and Love*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rae-Espinoza H (2011) The children of émigrés in Ecuador: Narratives of cultural reproduction and emotion in transnational social fields. In: Coe C, Reynolds RR, Boehm DA, et al. (eds) *Everyday Ruptures: Children, Youth, and Migration in Global Perspective*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt, pp.115–138.
- Shaw JE (2018) Desiring self-determination in research and beyond: Parental consent requirements and situated ethics for migrant young people living amid changing family dynamics. *Children & Society* 32(6): 433–443.
- Stevenson L (2014) *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Thorne B (1993) *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Ty E and Goellnicht D (2004) *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

United Nations and Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (2005) *Family reunification* (OHCHR migration papers). <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/migration/taskforce/docs/familyreunification.pdf>

Yarris KE (2014) “Quiero ir y no quiero ir” (I want to go and I don’t want to go): Nicaraguan children’s ambivalent experiences of transnational family life. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 19(2): 284–309.

### **Author biography**

Jennifer E Shaw is an assistant teaching professor in Sociology and Politics at Thompson Rivers University, ne Secwepemcúl’ecw. She is a cultural anthropologist and multimodal ethnographer. Her research broadly concerns how young people navigate transnational and familial changes through migration, along with issues of gendered labor, migrant labor, and labor precarity. Her recent publications include “Tender Labor: Transnational Young People and Continuums of Familial Care” in *Anthropology of Work Review* (2020) and “Desiring Self-Determination in Research and Beyond: Parental Consent Requirements and Situated Ethics for Migrant Young People” in *Children & Society* (2018).