Masculinity on the margins: Boundary work among immobile fathers in Indonesia’s transnational families

Abstract

Scholars underline the persistence of gender disparities in the household division of labor. However, it remains understudied how working-class men manage family life amid the physical absence of breadwinning women. Drawing on 54 in-depth interviews and over 22 months of fieldwork in Indonesia, this article investigates how non-migrant fathers navigate conjugal and paternal responsibilities in families headed by migrant mothers. I argue that the reproduction of mother-away transnational families hinges on a refashioning of male conduct for the accomplishment of immobile fatherhood — a model of parenthood developed by non-migrant fathers to accommodate the migration of mothers. I examine the boundary work that men engage in to affirm their selfhood when confronted with the diminution of labor market prospects. In response to their status anxieties surrounding the mounting autonomy of transnational mothers, immobile fathers craft moral boundaries around a commitment to the family. Furthermore, immobile fathers reconstitute masculinity away from providership towards an assemblage of waged labor, childrearing, financial management, and housework that comprises the hallmarks of working-class femininities. By positioning themselves as “family men” in contradiction to irresponsible men and women, immobile fathers realize self-respect through their maintenance of transnational families.

Key Words: fathering, gender, masculinity, transnational family, boundary work

Introduction

Over the past four decades, a burgeoning demand for paid reproductive labor has engendered a feminization of migration, as working-class women from the Global South are being incorporated into the global labor market to perform care services in the North (Parreñas 2000; Schewel 2021). The departure of migrant mothers, in turn, has inspired feminist theorizing about who cares for children "left behind" in natal communities.

Gender scholars suggest that the provision of childcare in transnational families — families whose members are geographically dispersed across more than one society — is borne by women. When men work abroad, wives who stay behind serve as care providers in a matrimonial relationship whereby husbands send remittances for family sustenance (Nobles 2011; Pribilsky 2007). Although the migration of women has the potential to break gender barriers, analysts stress that migrant women assume a principal parenting role emanating from the ideology of feminine domesticity, wherein mothers are socialized to manage the household to complement fathers' breadwinning (Paul 2015). Transnational mothers exhibit maternal affection to children from afar while entrusting the latter's care to extended families in origin communities (Boccagni 2012; Schmalzbauer 2004). These studies reach similar conclusions about the reproduction of gender inequality, positing that fathers espouse gender norms that consign mothers to the domestic realm (Gallagher and Smith 1999; Legerski and Cornwall 2010).

However, scholars have seldom scrutinized the identities and practices of *non-migrant* fathers in transnational families where migrant mothers are the primary earners. Unlike migrant fathers who contract out childrearing to their wives (Hirsch 2003; Kilkey 2013), I postulate that non-migrant fathers are incapable of passing on childcare to migrant mothers owing to immigration policies that proscribe family settlement, and are embedded in intergenerational power dynamics that constrain their capacity to enlist kin assistance. Non-migrant fathers with migrant spouses present a litmus test for masculinity on the margins, inviting consideration of how female migration reconstitutes the household division of labor. How do men forge identities when they are unable to migrate internationally and must delegate their partners to become breadwinners? How do immobile fathers navigate familial responsibilities in the absence of transnational mothers?

Extending the insights of cultural sociology to scholarship on migration and masculinities, this article investigates how working-class men in Indonesia construct meanings surrounding conjugality and fatherhood in mother-away transnational families. As the world's fourth most populous nation and largest sender of migrant domestic workers, Indonesia is important to study because of the prevalence of transnational families headed by women. Drawing on 54 in-depth interviews with women and men of diverse marital and occupational backgrounds, I argue that the reproduction of female-headed transnational families hinges on a refashioning of male conduct for the accomplishment of what I term *immobile fatherhood*. Immobile fatherhood is a model of parenthood developed by non-migrant fathers to accommodate the migration of mothers. I theorize the cultural construction of immobile fatherhood by exploring the identity work (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009) men engage in to affirm their selfhood when confronted with the diminution of labor market prospects.

This article finds that female migration encourages immobile fathers to embody a malleable style of manhood that challenges the assumption that low-income men reinforce female subordination to compensate for their limited resources (Pyke 1996; Radhakrishnan and Solari 2015). I document mutually reinforcing mechanisms of identity formation that enable immobile fathers to ameliorate disparities in the gendered division of labor. First, immobile fathers craft moral boundaries around a commitment to the family in alignment with the expectations of transnational mothers. Second, immobile fathers reconfigure masculinity away from providership towards an assemblage of waged labor, childrearing, financial management, and housework that comprises the hallmarks of working-class femininities. By positioning themselves as "family men" in contradiction to women and men they perceive as irresponsible, immobile fathers realize self-respect through their maintenance of transnational families.

Working-Class Fatherhood

Connell (2005) conceptualizes hegemonic masculinity as the most honorable expression of manliness within a hierarchy of masculinities that, by serving as a metric against which all men are judged, operates to preserve a male-dominated social order. From this perspective, the ideology of male headship and providership enacted by white, upper-class, heterosexual men in the private sphere constitutes a normative ideal by which Western societies assess the quality of men's gender performances (Gallagher and Smith 1999). Nonetheless, scholars uncover how globalization intersects with class, sexuality, race, and other matrices of difference to produce a plurality of subordinated masculinities that not only deviate from hegemonic masculinity, but also aid in mitigating gender inequality (Ray 2021).

Specifically, global economic restructuring has catalyzed the formation of dual-earner households while propelling a cultural shift more favorable to involved fatherhood (Deutsch 2007; Sullivan 2004). The decline of men's ability to be single providers, and women's entry into the workforce, have incentivized families to adjust the requirements for reproductive labor — the labor necessary for social reproduction that encompasses childcare and housework. This reconfiguration of gender roles is pronounced among working-class families, whose experiences of labor-market precarity frequently demand spousal co-parenting and co-breadwinning (Doucet and Lee 2014).

Still, some scholars emphasize that working-class men reassert male prowess to counteract economic loss, through hypermasculine tactics such as physical aggression, alcoholism, and sexual philandering (Pyke 1996; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). However, these findings about the *compensatory* nature of working-class manhood have been contested by research noting that men may abandon male domination by reframing masculinity in an ethic of responsibility (Edin and Nelson 2013; Gutmann 2006; Ray 2021). In fact, men of marginalized class and ethnoracial backgrounds are crafting involved parenting styles reminiscent of motherhood (Randles 2020; Shows and Gerstel 2008).

These theoretical contributions to working-class masculinities notwithstanding, researchers conventionally examine fathering in situations where parents, whether they cohabit or reside apart, live in relative proximity to children. We know less about working-class masculinities in migratory circumstances, where the international separation of family members may present distinct challenges for fatherhood.

Transnational Fatherhood

Stringent immigration policies, in tandem with legal and financial obstacles for family settlement, compel migrants' cultivation of cross-border kinship ties through the forging of transnational families. These family forms ease social reproduction by dispatching breadwinners in destination locales and retaining less productive members in origin societies to avail of the lower costs of upkeep (Mazzucato and Schans 2011). As breadwinning and caregiving are spatially segregated, the formation of transnational families raises vital questions about the intra-household allocation of power and resources.

In father-away transnational families, men pursue international migration to accomplish breadwinning masculinity. Migrant men's sense of self is connected with their protection of the family, which is achieved through a package deal (Townsend 2010) of companionate marriage, providership, and non-nurturant fatherhood (Hirsch 2003; Osella and Osella 2000; Pribilsky 2007). Consequently, left-behind mothers shoulder the brunt of care work (Boccagni 2012; Schmalzbauer 2004).

Nevertheless, transnational fathers increasingly value emotionally expressive patterns of parenting that denote the waning influence of breadwinning in their selfhood. They experience the psychological pains of family separation and bond with children through telephone calls, social visits, and monetary compensation (Kilkey 2013; Pribilsky 2007). Moreover, when women spearhead family migration and ease their husbands' integration into host states, migrant fathers are amenable to intensive parenting (Gallo and Scrinzi 2016; George 2005).

Despite making important strides in theorizing transnational fatherhood, scholars have paid scant attention to the masculinities of *non-migrant fathers* with migrant partners. While transnational fathers relegate non-migrant mothers to domesticity, immobile fatherhood arises from structural conditions that necessitate the independent migration of mothers. Because they depend on the financial support of nonresident mothers and cannot physically pass on care work to them, I submit that immobile fathers are more likely to reconfigure masculinity through childcare.

Immobile Fatherhood and Boundary Work

Proponents of the aspiration-capability approach examine the causes of widespread immobility in an epoch of international migration, underlining a mismatch between individuals' aspirations and capabilities for migration (Carling 2002; Schewel 2021). Carling and Schewel (2018) conceptualize (im)mobility as a two-step process: aspiration refers to the conviction that migration is preferable to staying and capability the ability to attain that aspiration. This process is conditioned by a structure of opportunities and constraints encompassing immigration policies, the emigration environment, and individual characteristics (Carling 2002; Carling and Schewel 2018). The aspiration-capability framework is useful for distinguishing migration from non-migration as well as varying categories of immobility. In this view, people are mobile if they possess a desire and capacity to migrate; *involuntarily* immobile if they intend, but are unable, to migrate; *voluntarily* immobile if they prefer to stay; and *acquiescently* immobile if they neither aspire to nor are capable of migrating (Schewel 2021).

In parallel with the (im)mobility turn in migration theorizing, feminist migration scholars conceive of gender as a social structure shaping the political, cultural, and economic environment for migration that can induce gendered patterns of (im)mobility (Oishi 2005). Notably, the feminization of migration policies and labor markets, as epitomized by rising demands for paid care work and the depletion of male-dominated manufacturing jobs in the Global North, may foster a coincidence of female mobility and male immobility in the South — a pattern prevalent in some origin countries in Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe (Chang 2021; Solari 2017). Transnational motherhood and immobile fatherhood, then, can be viewed as a household livelihood strategy within a gendered mobility regime that absorbs women to the relative exclusion of men.

While scholars have studied the subjectivities of immobile fathers, their findings are inconclusive, partly because the study of masculinities is peripheral in a genre of migration research that revolves around transnational motherhood (for a critique, see Fresnoza-Flot 2013). Among the few scholars who explore the identities of men who stay behind, Gallo (2006) reveals how sending communities stigmatize them as “waiting husbands” for depending on their wives for immigration sponsorship. Other analysts posit a surge in male backlash to female emigration, as encapsulated in drinking, womanizing, wife-beating, and gambling (Chant 1996). Still others contend that while immobile fathers partake in reproductive labor, they manage their diminished standing by channeling energy into waged work, by deemphasizing paternal caregiving, by underplaying the financial contributions of transnational mothers, or by asserting greater control over household decision-making (Hoang and Yeoh 2011; Pingol 2001). While this body of research emphasizes a *compensatory* reenactment of male authority, I highlight an alternative kind of identity work that involves men’s adaptation to female mobility and search for respectability.

Cultural sociologists maintain that boundary work is a foundational process in the making of the self, a mechanism of impression management that delineates “us” (insiders) and “them” (outsiders) at the interactional level. Boundary work entails a double regulation of the ego and the Other: it is about forging symbolic boundaries to deflect stigma, construct selfhood, and elevate status in a social hierarchy, often through the repudiation of an abject Other (Lamont 2021; Pachucki, Pendergrass, and Lamont 2007). Amid structural barriers that circumscribe their life chances, members of marginalized groups cement their identities through boundary demarcation with individuals who are similarly positioned, socially dominant, or subordinate to themselves. They may engage in a strategy of “defensive othering” — attributing stigma to other subordinates to identify with dominants — and may reject, rather than embrace, the moral values propagated by dominants (Ezzell 2009).

Boundary processes have been documented in the sociology of class, gender, race, and religion, and are pivotal in migrant identity-making (Fjær, Pedersen, and Sandberg 2015; Gurrentz 2014; Lamont 2021; Sumerau 2012). Gallo (2013) explores a boundary-making strategy used by emigrant elites to bolster symbolic power in origin communities. She demonstrates how upper castes in Kerala, India, maintain boundaries along caste and gender divides in their evaluations of migration pathways. Capable of emigrating to the West as skilled professionals, Malayali elites reinforce their superiority over women and men from lower castes by demeaning the remittances the latter send home from low-wage destinations. By contrast, Purser (2009) elucidates how a cohort of male immigrant day laborers in California deploy gender tropes to dignify themselves as masculine hard workers, while denigrating another set of migrant men jobseekers as "welfare queens." This article extends theoretical advances on boundary work and working-class masculinities to immobile fatherhood. I uncover how the act of drawing moral distinctions among men and women allows immobile fathers to reshape and preserve gender boundaries. I show that immobile fathers construct their masculinity not only by avowing their upstanding selves and spouses, but also by disavowing *other* fathers and mothers deemed as negligent in their familial obligations. This study traces the process by which immobile fathers "undo gender" (Deutsch 2007) in partnership with transnational mothers by analyzing 1) the moment when breadwinning masculinity is destabilized and 2) the boundary construction of immobile fatherhood.

Context

With the formalization of a labor-export policy in the early 1980s, Indonesia has become a major labor supplier thanks to an alliance between private employment agencies and a state bureaucracy that oversees bilateral labor agreements with recipient countries. Indonesia's emigration patterns are segmented by gender and occupation, marked by a higher degree of mobility for women domestic workers. Numbering an estimated 2.1 million (Parreñas et al. 2018), Indonesian migrant domestics are primarily deployed to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, among the top four destinations for Indonesian migrants worldwide (BP2MI 2021). In 2019, domestics made up 54 percent, and women nearly 70 percent, of 263,755 outgoing migrants, as a significant portion of women were employed in the formal sector, which includes factories and nursing homes (BP2MI 2021). In the same year, only 2.4 percent of migrants received placements in manufacturing, a key occupational sector for men (BP2MI 2021). Intense competition for industrial jobs in Taiwan, a leading destination for Indonesian factory workers, compels prospective migrants to expend brokerage commissions ranging from $2,000 to $2,900 (Chang 2021). These costs are considered prohibitive for many rural denizens, but are waived for migrant domestics due to employer sponsorship. As domestic service promises a faster route to capital accumulation without incurring the excessive debt that beleaguers migrant men, families tend to send women abroad. In 2019, remittances from international migrants totaled US$11.43 billion, making up Indonesia's second largest source of foreign exchange after petroleum and gas (Kompas 2022).

Indonesian gender ideology, as constituted by social norms and legislation governing marriage and divorce, provides the cultural repertoire for the evaluation of gender practices. Indonesian society conceives of marriage, parenthood, income security, and home ownership as emblematic of a successful adulthood, a cultural ideal underpinned by complementary gender roles among heterosexual dyads (Geertz 2015). Under Indonesian family law, husbands are conferred symbolic headship and are obligated to provide for the family, with wives designated as household managers. In practice, women are rarely subordinate in the family on account of their decision-making authority concerning childrearing, property, and employment (Geertz 2015). As in Andean Ecuador (Pribilsky 2007), men in Indonesia are expected to surrender earnings to their wives for the management of household finances, a practice that enhances female autonomy in the economic domain. Women are also accustomed to waged labor and may dispose of their incomes as they see fit, without interference from fathers and husbands (Elmhirst 2002).

Indonesia's bilateral kinship system and marriage regulations further curtail men's position in the family. Descent and inheritance are reckoned equally through both parents. Although classical Islamic jurisprudence grants husbands the right to dissolve a union through unilateral repudiation (*cerai talak*), Indonesia's religious courts require husbands to marshal evidence of irreconcilable differences and obtain judicial consent, in what is recognized as among the most liberal marriage legislation in the Muslim world (Rinaldo 2019). Today, with the support of increasingly gender-sensitive judges, women petition the majority of divorce lawsuits in Indonesia to contest male prerogatives, by citing husbands' violations of the marriage contract, such as a lack of financial provision, family abandonment, and adultery.

Methods

This article draws primarily from in-depth interviews, conducted in Indonesian, with 26 non-migrant men, five aspiring migrant men, five government officials, and 18 migrant women. Through referrals from village secretariats, personnel at employment agencies, and migrant returnees, I enlisted non-elite men of various marital statuses to explore their views on migration, conjugality, and fatherhood (Table 1). As interviews with men were mainly done in their homes, I observed the interactions they had with children, with their fathering practices verified by spouses, parents, friends, and/or village bureaucrats.

(Table 1 about here)

Except for a university-educated trader and three teachers, most male respondents can be characterized as members of the rural working class because of the casual nature of their employment and the agrarian origins of their parents. The labor market for small-scale agricultural production in Indonesia is marked by seasonal fluctuations of demand, producing incomes barely sufficient for subsistence. Hence, nearly all men possess internal migration histories before marriage, typically in construction, mining, plantation agriculture, and manufacturing where average monthly wages hover between one hundred and 300 dollars — often falling below the minimum wages set by subnational governments. Even men who hold college credentials or had migrated overseas reported being engaged in unskilled labor at one point. Men with international experiences usually worked for short spells in low-wage destinations like Malaysia when they were single, whereas their future spouses generally worked in high-wage destinations such as Hong Kong, frequently on multiple contracts. Following family formation, men who sought remigration became involuntarily immobile (Carling 2002), at a time when overseas opportunities were expanding more rapidly for women. A few fathers are voluntarily or acquiescently immobile (Schewel 2021). While the former hold stable professions, the latter are poor and do not intend to migrate. To compare the perspectives of immobile fathers and prospective migrant men, I interviewed three bachelors and two fathers about to commence factory work in Taiwan.

Of the male respondents whose marriages are intact and stated their residential patterns, 61 percent (n=14) live on the property of the wife's natal family, as compared to 35 percent (n=8) who do so with the husband's side of the family. This indicates the prominence of uxorilocality (husband's residence near the wife's natal family) in Indonesia. 83 percent (n=20) of immobile fathers had partners preparing to or were working overseas at the time of interview. The typical duration of a married woman's migration is between six to nine years.

This article is part of a multi-year research project on Indonesia's labor migration program. During the initial research phases (October 2014 to May 2015; January to December 2016; June to July 2017), I conducted participant observation in four employment agencies in Jakarta, Ponorogo, Surabaya, and Minahasa, Indonesia. These regions boast a concentration of companies specializing in the recruitment of migrant domestics and factory workers bound for destinations in the Asia-Pacific region. My positionality as a middle-class, Asian American researcher facilitated my entry to the firms, where I volunteered as a language assistant. To investigate the history of female emigration and its impact on gender relations, I supplemented ethnography with informal interviews involving members of 25 migrant households while resident in three hamlets in the Ponorogo Regency. Reporting an outflow of 9,699 workers in 2019, Ponorogo ranked as Indonesia's fourth largest migrant-sending regency (BP2MI 2021). To examine the effects of state policies on migration processes, I interviewed government officials in Ponorogo and Minahasa, a regency that recorded the placement of 54 migrant workers in 2016 (Disnakertrans 2016).

In addition, from December 2021 to July 2022, I performed a combination of remote and in-person life history interviews with 50 migrant women and left-behind family members residing in Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia, and Hong Kong, 44% of whom I had previously met in the agencies and villages. I recruited respondents through social media and snowball sampling. While this article focuses on immobile fatherhood, I utilized interviews with migrant women to highlight how their standpoints inform men's spousal obligations. Apart from five couples I interviewed separately, the female respondents are unrelated to their male counterparts. The female interviewees in this article form a subset of a larger sample of 145 migrant women. The inclusion of non-migrant men, migrant men, and migrant women offers an empirical window for comparing men of divergent migration capacities, and for exploring how male immobility shapes masculinity. I used pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of respondents.

The majority of interviewees are Javanese Muslims, and the rest are Sundanese Muslims and Minahasan and Javanese Christians. Respondents' ideas surrounding gender norms are similar despite ethnic, religious, and gender differences.[1] My assistants and I transcribed the interviews, though all translations are mine. I coded transcripts and fieldnotes using the data analysis software, NVivo. Through a combination of theory-driven and inductive coding (Deterding and Waters 2018), I developed my coding scheme to analyze the worldviews of immobile fathers, focusing on how they negotiate employment, childcare and housework. For example, I disaggregated the code "male practices and beliefs" into analytic subcategories, such as "boundary making," "rhetoric of responsibility," "breadwinning," "childcare," and "financial management."

Destabilizing Breadwinning Masculinity

A combination of cultural and economic shifts contributes to women's participation in labor migration and the attendant erosion of the male breadwinner model. While Indonesian society has historically stereotyped migrant women as victims of abuse (Chang 2018), I find that an equally potent source of gender stigma today stems from immobile fathers' failure to buttress female breadwinning. A discourse of abject manhood, as embodied by the lazy, spendthrift, and womanizing man, has emerged to regulate male behavior in Indonesian regions where female migration is well-established. This gender trope is rooted in the notion that immobile fatherhood contravenes the male provider ideology as enshrined in Indonesian family law. While achieving a stable livelihood is considered the husband's responsibility, women's pursuit of employment is not a social obligation, but an effort to "assist" husbands with breadwinning. This gendered distinction between providing for (*menafkahi*) and helping (*membantu*) the family undergirds conjugality. A religious court functionary I interviewed articulates this orthodox view, stressing that a husband's dependence on his wife's largesse is tantamount to an abdication of male providership, a legal rationale that may constitute grounds for divorce:

> For a wife to work abroad, it's a violation of Islamic norms. She works abroad to help her husband. But what happens then? In the beginning, the husband permits her to work abroad, but, in the end, he considers her as a cash cow (*pohon uang*), meaning he depends on his wife to provide for him and feels as if he had a right to do so. He's forgotten his duties as a man. The wife files for divorce because her husband isn't being a responsible provider.

Nevertheless, wage stagnation at home, coupled with the exorbitant costs of migration for men, renders the material improvement of families impracticable without women's migration, thereby necessitating a change in the male breadwinner ideal. The Indonesian state mandates labor migrants, irrespective of gender, to procure a letter of consent from their spouses or parents prior to overseas deployment. When I asked whether they consented to the migration of their wives, all the fathers stated they had expressed hesitation when their spouses broached the subject of working abroad. Only four men in my sample managed to circumvent female mobility by financing their own migration with personal savings and loans, or by launching small businesses to inveigle their wives to stay. These men possess more financial resources and adhere to the normative conception wherein husbands are primary earners. For example, Andri garnered a job in Taiwan with the intent to obstruct his wife's migration project. He imparts a belief common among the migrant men in my sample that domesticity is the exclusive domain of women: "My wife sought my permission to work in Hong Kong, but I didn't allow her. I told her I'd prefer to work abroad instead … As men, we're supposed to be providers. It makes no sense for wives to be breadwinners since it's enough for them to tend the household." By contrast, immobile fathers struggle to dissuade their spouses from leaving, as women can obtain international jobs without expending brokerage fees upfront. Immobile fathers are also unable to forestall their wives' departure because of their limited incomes and the backing of women's consanguineal kin.

A formerly mobile man, Teja boasts how he built a house with his savings from working as an undocumented migrant in South Korea for five years. Upon starting a family in Indonesia, he was mired in debt after failing to secure work on an American cruise ship and in a Korean factory during a two-year job hunt, a search that forced him to undertake costly language training courses to fulfill U.S. and Korean entry requirements. Uncertain about raising an infant on his own, Teja found himself in a fragile bargaining position owing to his inability to migrate and the intervention of his wife's relative, who had been working overseas: "I didn't immediately consent, as I was confused as to how to take care of our three-year-old son…Afterward, she had a female relative in Taiwan who helped her find a job. She told me, 'There's a cushy job lined up for me abroad.' That's when I decided to let her go."

The vicissitudes of the local economy also push men to accede to their wives' migratory aspirations, even if they have no desire to migrate and prefer the family to stay together. Dungus, a day laborer, subsists on growing coconut and cacao when there are few construction gigs. Though perceiving his income as sufficient, Dungus could not deter his wife from applying for a job in Singapore, a destination she believed would reward her with more capital:

> I told her, "If we work hard, we can surely achieve our goal, even though wages in Singapore are higher. If you try to earn money too fast, I'm scared that it'd be too risky. So, let me work hard to build our future, okay?" She replied, "But when? When are we ever gonna reach our target?... We'll have to wait until we're old if we go at it slowly." As she repeated this day after day, I was forced to accept [her decision].

Likewise, Sugiarto, a toy store vendor, intimates how his modest salary had weakened his leverage vis-à-vis his wife: "My salary ain't enough to cover my family's living expenses. Costs of living are skyrocketing these days. I felt heavy having to let my wife work abroad, but what else could I do? Our toddler needs alotta schooling funds, as she'll soon go to kindergarten."

Mirroring the struggles of Mexican women who fight for their migration to reunite with recalcitrant immigrant husbands in the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), Indonesian women's determination to achieve home ownership, career development, and children's educational advancement further thwarts their husbands' aversion to their migration projects. In a separate interview with Ariana, Sugiarto's wife, she stresses that she successfully elicited his support only after his plan to work in Taiwan had faltered because he was medically unfit. Ariana advocated her migration by contesting his breadwinning capabilities, while vocalizing her ability to garner remittances for building a home separate from her in-laws, with whom she does not get along:

> I wanted to own a house. I didn't feel comfortable living with my in-laws, as they are stuck-up and unkind. I thought to myself, 'I need to be financially independent so that I'll never have to ask for money from my parents or in-laws.' Still, I became doubtful when he didn't allow me to go abroad. Eventually, I became assertive (*galak*) and said, 'If you don't let me go, are you able to provide for me? What's your responsibility as a husband?'…I felt I was ready to earn money on my own then.

Similarly, Agnes, a migrant domestic to Taiwan while single, exercised her agency by invoking an intent to muster educational funds for her eldest daughter. With the passing of her in-laws, who had long opposed her migration plans, Agnes felt emboldened to pressure her husband to authorize her passage to Hong Kong: "I wanted to earn money so that my daughter could attend medical school to become a doctor. I told my husband, 'It's my goal to work abroad. Whether you allow me or not, I'll still go overseas!'"

In short, women's resolve to improve family welfare amid tenuous financial circumstances leads men to endorse female migration notwithstanding their reservations. The exodus of migrant mothers would spawn a gender-role swap and a transition in the male provider model, paving the way for the cultural construction of immobile fatherhood.

Marking the Boundaries of Immobile Fatherhood

In the following sections, I demonstrate how immobile fathers come to play a supporting role in household management and embody new conjugal and parenting ideals. Transnational couples elevate work and parenthood to solidify the boundaries around masculinity, in a context where migrant women assume the primary responsibility for breadwinning. In particular, the specter of abject masculinities operates as a cultural regulatory mechanism. This stigma is derived from Indonesia’s gender scripts and a communal animosity towards a panoply of male vices — slothfulness, wastefulness, unfaithfulness, and child neglect — that are believed to materialize when women are away. In turn, transnational mothers rely on the allocation of remittances, the threat of divorce, and village networks to preclude the manifestation of failed masculinities.

Against this sociocultural backdrop, immobile fathers display their moral commitment to the transnational family through boundary work. Men depict themselves as hard workers, proficient financial managers, loyal spouses, and doting fathers, describing their contributions to waged labor, remittance management, and childrearing as exceptional and, therefore, meriting respect. Besides orchestrating their responsibilities to evade communal ostracization, immobile fathers repudiate other men and women for not holding up their end of the conjugal bargain. I analyze three dimensions of boundary-making deployed by immobile fathers. First, immobile fathers reconceptualize masculinity away from providership towards labor. Second, they accentuate their participation in care work. Third, they reproduce marital norms by articulating a desirable, as well as an abhorrent, femininity to fortify the complementarity between immobile fatherhood and transnational motherhood.

From Breadwinning to Work

Immobile fathers extol work as a masculine virtue. They take part in gainful employment to portray themselves as diligent, financially astute, and loyal, in contradistinction to the depraved Other: the lazy, prodigal, and licentious man. When inquired about why he returned to agricultural labor after being a full-time father, Susilo underscores slothfulness as a mortifying quality for men: “First, if I didn’t work, I’d bring shame to my in-laws. Second, I’d bring shame to my community. That's why I have to work in the fields to keep me busy." Ismoyono, a former internal migrant, further identifies male idleness and reckless spending as an infringement on a wife's culturally prescribed role in managing family finances: "For a man to waste money is an ugly thing, because managing finances isn't his but the wife's right. The woman is sending money from abroad only because she's helping the family, that is, collaborating with him to eke out a living. The onus is still on the husband to work."

To comply with conjugal norms, immobile fathers shoulder an intense regimen of labor and consult with their wives on the use of remittances. Indra, a high school graduate, takes on two jobs and raises his moral standing through exhibiting his work ethic. After taking a half-hour break from his daytime construction job, Indra sets up a stall in the night market hawking children's toys, toiling from 5 to 9 p.m. While admitting his wages are meager, Indra believes that working hard to provide for the family is an honorable act for working-class fathers. He relishes the satisfaction he gains from imagining he is working alongside his wife for his child's betterment:

> I can give my money to my son and say, "Hey, here's pocket money for you." It makes both of us happy, right? For a man, it's important to provide for your wife and child, even though in reality our money is so little. For members of the working class like me, what's important is that my wife and I work together so that we can accumulate [savings]…Although my wife is over there, here at home I need to keep working to stray away from negative thinking, to keep myself busy, so that I feel I'm working together with her.

At the same time, Indra's motives for taking on a 12-hour workday are influenced by the fear of being typecast as a womanizing spendthrift, a kind of man he denigrates as repugnant:

> When a woman works abroad, her faith in her husband at home is nearly gone. Neighbors, friends, and family members tell [her], 'Your husband is like this, like that.'

> Yes, I became the subject of gossip…[But] there are many men out there given money from abroad. Snarky (*judes*) guys really. The wife comes home and goes, 'Where's my money?' Many are spendthrifts like that … A guy shouldn't be like that. If a wife sends money to the husband, he'll try to have a fling with other girls.

Mahesa, a former migrant factory worker to Taiwan, also presents himself as a morally superior father, contrasting his hard work and savvy budgeting skills with the unbridled spending habits of other men:

> My wife's earnings went straight to her bank account. For daily needs, income from agriculture was enough. I'd work in the fields, drive passengers to the airport, and buy and sell cars … [But] when a wife works abroad, the husband typically wastes her money. I'm not like that. The proof is that I had bought land with my wife's remittances.

To preempt hypermasculine gender displays, transnational mothers, too, demand their husbands to work and earn an income for their own subsistence through controlling the purse strings. Women reported curbing the volume of remittances they sent to husbands, setting up separate bank accounts, and designating their families of origin as the recipients of remittances. Women further require husbands to reserve remittances for major household expenditures, such as home remodeling, land purchases, and seed capital for family businesses.

Rotin, a former domestic to Taiwan, issued a warning before leaving and partially remits her salary to her husband, a village official, to avoid the prospect of him squandering her earnings, eschewing work, and finding another woman:

> I earmarked money for my parents and myself so that my husband wouldn't depend on my salary. Sometimes men become lazy since they're getting money from migrant women. Some even dare to spend their wives' earnings on another woman! We work so hard in saving money, so it's disappointing when our husbands spend it away … So, I told my husband before going abroad, "You're a village official. That means everything you do will be watched by many. If you misbehave, you'll lose your wife and your child."

Even migrant women who transfer the entirety of their remittances pressure their husbands to work. Despite being stranded in a labor market that has become more precarious during the coronavirus pandemic, Dimas, a parking attendant whose livelihood depends on tips from customers, obeys his wife's wish that he remain a secondary earner by depositing his earnings to their joint bank account:

> Dimas: My wife demanded that I contribute [$100] per month to our account… After Covid hit, it became tough to earn a living, so she now asks me to contribute [$80].
>
> Interviewer: Why is that? Doesn't she have her own salary?
>
> Dimas: She thinks I should be a responsible husband by providing for her. I do this because… she's working abroad to help me, so it's her right to ask me for money.

By magnifying their economic contributions, and by disparaging other men for misappropriating the remittances of transnational mothers, immobile fathers achieve self-esteem despite earning incomes considerably lower and less secure than their spouses'. Moreover, women and men collaborate to redefine masculinity based on immobile fathers' capacity to supplement the household income and co-manage expenditures, rather than their ability to be a sole provider.

From Breadwinning to Care Work

To distinguish themselves from "dead-beat dads," immobile fathers further revise masculinity by casting infant care as skilled labor that is taxing, time-consuming, and cumbersome. Among the fathers who described their parenting role in some detail, 52 percent (n=11) and 48 percent (n=10) reported serving as primary and secondary childcare providers, respectively.

Secondary caregivers possess a steady day job, rearing infants with the aid of paternal or maternal kin. For instance, a chauffeur during the day while his coresident in-laws look after his two boys, Adam, immerses himself in childrearing after coming home from work: “For guys, it’s kinda tough to raise a kid… If my sons cry, I’d make milk for them. Sometimes they cry when they’re hungry. I’d give them food and they’d stop crying! Or I’d play with them at night. The next day, I’d head off to work. When I’m home from work, my mother-in-law would immediately surrender the kids to me.”

By contrast, primary caregivers are typically unemployed or lack a regular job. They attribute their intensive fathering to spousal agreement, children’s preferences, and a reluctance to entrust childcare to others. Notably, to prevent intergenerational conflict, men in uxorilocal households sometimes avoid seeking help from their wives’ parents. Yanto, a single father, regards childrearing as a paternal duty that should not be outsourced to his coresident, former in-laws: “Parenting is my responsibility, not my in-laws’. I’d bathe my daughter and help her put on clothes when she was little. I’d also wake up early to cook.”

Primary caregivers stress their inability to work outside the home until their children reach schooling age, likening fatherhood to a full-time job. Edi, who lives on his in-laws’ land, raises his stature as an involved father by refuting the notion that fathering is shameful and by characterizing it as more strenuous than labor:

> Thankfully, I can do all the chores. I’m not ashamed of it. I’d even spoon-feed my child... I was literally unable to work for more than two years…I’d much rather work, ‘cause it’s frigging (*minta ampun*) hard, frigging tiring, and frigging annoying having to care for a little child.

Amplifying his character as a “stay-at-home dad,” Aditya also conveys how he wrestled with childrearing while awaiting remittances during his wife’s first year of migration:

> It's troublesome caring for an 18-month child! For the first two months, the workload was hefty, but after six months, I acclimated better… As he was so little, he couldn't be left home alone. It really stressed me out! … I had to focus on caring for our child as my wife was working abroad. I couldn't work for two years, so I didn't have a dime (*sepeser*) before my wife sent me money.

The views of Edi and Aditya highlight the tension between waged labor and infant care for at-home fathers. They feel compelled to legitimate their unemployment by framing childrearing as a paramount responsibility, even though working mothers have long endured the "double day" (Hochschild and Machung 2003) by juggling waged labor and unpaid reproductive labor.

Still, the valorization of childcare among immobile fathers exemplifies a masculinity that is characterized not so much by breadwinning as by nurturance. Indeed, rather than devaluing care work because it is a traditionally feminine sphere, these fathers forge boundaries with other men for being uninvolved in child development. For instance, distancing himself from "absent fathers," Edi commands respect for having stimulated father-child attachment while his wife encountered difficulties in bonding with their son:

> Usually, guys don't wanna learn how to raise kids. They'd pass on the care of kids to grandparents … even though it's the husband's responsibility to be a father. So, in the end, it's the kid that becomes the victim, because they're not given enough affection … My experience is [different]. My wife teared up when our son didn't wanna hug her when she returned for a visit. That's because I've been the one giving him affection for the last eight years.

Even as their children grow older, fathers exude pride in their competence in balancing childrearing and paid work. Teja, a stay-at-home dad when his son was little, illuminates how he continues organizing his work schedule around his 9-year-old's activities:

> I'd wake up at five a.m. to prepare food, then I'd bathe him, and then send him to kindergarten. My son didn't like to be left at school for too long, so I had to wait there until it was time to take him home. Now my son is a bit grown-up. So, while I don't get to work full time for a single day, I can still leave for work harvesting rice. Before my son comes back from school at noon, though, I must stand by to prepare food at home. And later, I have to do laundry…I have to do everything on my own. take care of the kid, wash clothes, clean the house. If one isn't skillful (*pandai-pandai*), it can be very stressful.

Here, Teja is emphasizing care work as skill-intensive and how he allocates time to meal preparation, laundry, and housekeeping — tasks traditionally performed by mothers (Hochschild and Machung 2003). Echoing the narratives of Edi and Teja, in 2016, Dimas reported alternating between childcare and employment, occasionally cutting down on work hours to attend to his son's needs. Branding himself as "a mother and a father," Dimas worked for five hours a day in addition to caring for his son as part of the conjugal bargain:

> [My wife] said, "I'm gonna be the one to work abroad ... Why don't you stay home and take good care of our kid while looking for whatever odd jobs you can?"… We made an agreement: I'd be the one to take care of our son while working on the side. We're in this together for his future, so even though I'm left behind, I wouldn't look for outside help. I do this work, meaning I'm both a mother and a father.

In a follow-up interview in 2022, Dimas insists that despite now taking on an eight-hour day, he still cares for his 8-year-old upon the latter's return from school. Dimas elaborates on how he had independently acquired his parenting acumen while being left behind for over eight years:

> My son is now older, but I still bathe and feed him. No one has taught me how to take care of him, not even my wife … After all, I've been raising him since he was 5 months old, bathing him, and washing his clothes by hand. I even put him to sleep before I call my wife at night, otherwise, he'd refuse to go to bed!

Beyond the physical and emotional tasks of childcare, immobile fathers provide educational guidance that transcends the traditional disciplinary role of fathers. Kuswan, a college graduate, has cultivated the scholastic aptitude of his two daughters — the eldest of whom is pursuing a bachelor's degree — by monitoring their schooling and by cultivating their aspiration for upward mobility:

> Educating a child isn't just about feeding them but also educating them. I teach my daughters to value education rather than wealth …I used to be very strict. I supervised my daughters and organized their study schedules. I wanted them to progress academically. Whenever my daughters didn't want to study, I'd tell them, 'If you don't want to go to school, that's fine. Feel free to become a vegetable trader in the market.'

Kuswan's devotion to his children's academics is attested by the fact that I interviewed him before he was about to pick up his younger daughter with his motorbike from a private tutorial program located 25 miles from their hometown.

Importantly, transnational mothers and other family members validate paternal caregiving by permitting men to defer employment or to be partially employed while rearing infants. Wati, a former migrant domestic, sympathizes with the multiple obstacles of her late husband — who died of Covid-19 in 2021 — recalling how he handled the emotional distress of spousal separation and childrearing that was compounded by financial scarcity:

> We switched professions, meaning I became the breadwinner while my husband became the caretaker. Though my husband was a seller in the market, he couldn't focus [on his trade] because he was taking care of the kids. That's why his income was extremely minimal. I can't even describe how he felt, having a wife so far away … On top of it, I didn't always have the money to send him, so he faced economic issues. Those were tough times.

Other women also corroborate the gendered transitions underway in female-headed transnational families, lending credence to the significance of care work for fathers. Mina, a nursing assistant who has worked in Taiwan for a decade, values her husband’s fathering more than providership: “Even though I’m the main breadwinner and my husband works, what’s more important for me is that he raises our kids rather than be a provider. My kids are my number one priority.” An elderly mother in a multigenerational household substantiates the contributions of her son, Surendra, to childrearing, housework, and tending the farm. One night, I observed Surendra interacting with his 4-year-old daughter when she woke bawling. Surendra, whose wife was working in Taiwan, rushed over to carry the child in his arms, gently patting her back while ambling across the living room. Surendra coaxed the girl with a pacifier, tucked her in bed, and did not leave her until she was asleep. Out of his earshot, I inquired Surendra’s mother regarding her granddaughter’s primary care provider, to which she responded unflinchingly: “My son is the one who takes care of his child.”

Despite being left behind, immobile fathers express their sense of accomplishment for being emotionally present in their children’s lives and for navigating the double shift like working mothers. In enumerating the trials and tribulations of childrearing, these narratives foreground the centrality of fatherhood in men’s sense of self, complicating the notion that working-class fathers shun care work to avert the shame of emasculation (Gamburd 2000).

From Immobile Fatherhood to Transnational Motherhood

Concomitant with the specter of failed masculinities are men’s anxieties surrounding female empowerment. Just as men envision immobile fatherhood as being germane to children’s welfare, they refute the cosmopolitanism and champion the familial sacrifices of migrant mothers to delineate the boundaries of transnational motherhood.

The sense of powerlessness immobile fathers experience is encapsulated in their angst about the mounting autonomy of transnational mothers in the realms of sexuality, consumption, and divorce. Tulus, a former male migrant to Brunei, observes that migrant women's broadening horizons can lead them to forsake husbands back home: "The most common problem for marital conflict [among transnational couples] is jealousy. Another issue stems from the woman looking for a more attractive, clever, or *macho* man." Aditya further opines how exposure to a cosmopolitan lifestyle can induce migrant women to reappraise the qualities of their spouses:

> Before going abroad, the wife might have good relations with her husband, with a plan to improve their economic circumstances. But in one or two years, she begins to change. He is seen as lacking or backward in some way. She also begins to enjoy the glamours of overseas life. So, she divorces him to marry another man.

Mudik's statement is also indicative of men's angst about female migration. A village secretary previously left behind by a migrant wife, Mudik disparages migrant women's attention-seeking mannerisms, narrating a scenario wherein a migrant domestic flaunted her sexuality and defied her immobile husband:

> After seeing on Facebook that his wife was wearing clothes that were overly sexy, a husband ordered her to stop. She retorted: 'I bought my clothes with my own money, so I can do whatever I wish.' These migrant women are so arrogant (*sombong*). When they come home from overseas, they carry these huge handbags, wear high heels, and dye their hair blonde!

Resisting the prospect of a reversed gender order, the immobile fathers who are primarily divorcees (n=5) discredit transnational mothers for engaging in irresponsible behaviors typically associated with men, such as extramarital affairs and child abandonment. Although the experiences of single fathers are unique, they share similar anxieties as married fathers about the misconduct of transnational mothers. Both groups of fathers patrol the boundaries of transnational motherhood by denigrating the unscrupulous Other: the unfaithful, hypersexual, and glamorous woman.

Divorcees project their anxieties by faulting their spouses for being derelict in their wifely duties and deserting the family for another man. Mardhi, a recently remarried father, laments his ex-wife's decision to unilaterally divorce him on account of his poverty: "I was heartbroken when I found out my wife had uploaded a picture with another man on Facebook…Then, unbeknownst to me, she had her attorney notify me to show up at the court. She demanded a divorce, noting that her life with me had been rough because I was too poor." In a slightly different rhetoric, Estu, a single father of three, voices his moral indignation about his partner's alleged infidelity, labeling her as promiscuous and unmotherly: "My ex only cared about satisfying her lust (*nafsu*). But she had a lot to lose and nothing to gain. By eloping with another man, she lost her children and her family. All she cared about was pleasing herself. She'd forgotten about her family." Like Estu, Janu, a construction worker, asserts his position as a dedicated husband to differentiate himself from his unfaithful, estranged spouse. He chastises her for deflecting attention from her supposed affair with a college-educated man and spreading rumors about his flaws as a husband:

> She's clever at manipulating facts, telling friends I haven't worked ever since my daughter was born, that I only ate and slept, ate and slept. She's got tons of money and belittles me, even though I've been working and caring for my daughter. Though she's cheating on me, friends think I'm the misbehaving one.

While Janu, Estu, and Mardhi's accounts indicate immobile fathers' attempts to exercise moral leadership over transnational mothers, they also evince profound insecurities about female empowerment. In a context where all the single fathers reported being their children's primary caregivers both during female migration and following divorce, their purported commitment to, and rejection by, their spouses ostensibly signify a sense of double betrayal. This sentiment is exacerbated by the fact that their wives suspended the flow of remittances before divorce. For married fathers, the threat of divorce impels them to strengthen marital bonds. For example, Edi reminds his wife of her place in rural society to discourage her from embodying the repugnant femininity of the glamorous migrant woman: “If I’m not super careful, everything can fall apart! The most important goal is to develop trust and to remember that our goal is to improve family welfare…I told her, ‘Whatever you do overseas, you’ll remain a domestic worker. If you’re looking for *glamour*, it’ll vanish quickly after you return home.”

Beyond rejecting abject femininities, immobile fathers exalt the self-sacrifice of transnational mothers as an exemplar for womanhood. Bimo, an adjunct instructor, glorifies his wife as a maternal role model for prioritizing his and their child’s needs above her own:

> My wife is an extraordinary maternal figure (*sosok ibu*). When I attended college, she paid for my tuition by working as a *soto* [soup noodle] hustler. To this day, even when she’s working abroad, she’d think twice before buying something. She prioritizes the family… She’d think about our child’s schooling needs, like stationery, then buy and send them to Indonesia.

Bimo is conveying a view held by some fathers that the most venerable expression of transnational motherhood is a selfless devotion to the family. Yet, when transnational mothers transgress this idealized femininity to pursue self-gratification, they are vilified by immobile fathers as a menace to manhood. By contrast, the women in this study do not oblige their husbands to exercise self-denial but merely responsibility.[2] The higher ethical standards by which Indonesian men evaluate migrant women resemble how Philippine society expects its migrant women to abide by the “traditional view of Filipina women as self-sacrificial, self-effacing, and always putting their family’s needs before their own” (Paul 2015, p.289).

Ultimately, the boundary work deployed by Indonesian immobile fathers demonstrates how they actively forge identities amid economic decline, simultaneously remaking and maintaining gender boundaries in an age of female mobility.

Discussion and Conclusion

Families across both the developing and industrialized worlds are witnessing an uptick in paternal involvement that crosscuts the divisions of class, race, nationality, and immigration status. This cultural shift has occurred against a landscape of neoliberal economic restructuring, a development that has widened income disparities, catapulted women into the workforce, and fueled the expansion of dual-provider families (Edin and Nelson 2013; Radhakrishnan and Solari 2015). Like working-class fathers elsewhere, the immobile fathers in this study face status anxieties concerning their downward mobility in the new economic order, clinging onto a diluted version of breadwinning masculinity amid structural conditions that hamper their achievement of the package deal. However, economic marginalization does not imply an inability to flexibly negotiate the requirements for reproductive labor. The heterosexual household remains a locus of solidarity and contestation where couples reconstruct the division of labor to balance the imperatives of production and consumption.

This article contributes to migration research by underlining the class implications of (im)mobilities on individuals and families. Global mobility regimes unevenly impinge on the lives of migrants, permitting some to bring their loved ones along while forcing others to leave them behind. In an effort to lure "foreign talent," governments across the globe have instituted preferential immigration schemes, from investment visas to permanent residency, to facilitate the integration of "expatriate" investors, entrepreneurs, and professionals, who are granted the privilege to settle jointly with dependents (Yeoh 2006). Meanwhile, states have devised restrictive temporary migration programs that confine economic migrants to low-wage occupations, mandate their separation from family members, and repatriate them at the conclusion of employment (Compernolle 2021). The implementation of graduated immigration policies has entrenched class inequality by compelling low-skilled sojourners to form transnational families, without the benefit of family unification enjoyed by highly skilled and affluent immigrants. These policies have the added impact of stratifying working-class people's migratory capabilities along gender and economic lines. As a result, individuals who possess fewer qualifications, financial resources, or desirable characteristics are rendered less mobile relative to those with higher volumes of human, cultural, economic, and social capital (Kim 2018).

My study also extends family scholarship by theorizing the cultural construction of immobile fatherhood. Researchers underscore the capacity of fathers in conventional families to experiment with emotionally expressive patterns of childrearing (Mazzucato and Schans 2011). In like fashion, students of transnational families stress that the emotional work of migrant fathers and left-behind mothers is vital for children's welfare, in light of mounting evidence that family separation can impair marital quality and harm children's educational outcomes (Compernolle 2021). But while transnational fathers conform to gender scripts that assign men to be primary providers (Hirsch 2003; Pribilsky 2007), I have shown that immobile fathers accord less symbolic weight to breadwinning and derive meaning from being children's proximate caregivers. The cherishing of parenthood among these fathers challenges the premise that men reinstate masculine power and spurn care work to cope with economic decline (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

While this study is unable to establish whether fathers continue to partake in reproductive labor upon the completion of their wives' migration projects, there is indication that immobile fatherhood has a transformative effect on male identities. Unlike men who devalue care work to disguise their insecurities about women's economic advancement (Radhakrishnan and Solari 2015), the immobile fathers in this study are invested in child-centered activities and are cognizant of the cultural importance of motherhood. For instance, Muhadir, a teacher who has been left behind for fifteen years, expresses his empathy for mothers, perceiving childcare to be more complex than the agricultural work to which rural men are accustomed: "To this day, I don't dare to belittle women, as I can recall my own experience of caring for my daughter. Actually, women's [care]work is incredibly challenging. Compared to working in the fields, raising children is so much harder." Immobile fathers thus partially undo gender (Deutsch 2007) by reducing gender differences in parenting in ways that approximate the cultural construct of motherhood. Future research may adopt a longitudinal research design similar to Taylor, Moran-Taylor, and Rodman Ruiz's study (2006) to evaluate changes in fathers' involvement in reproductive labor following the return of transnational mothers.

My research also illuminates the persistence of gender inertia in some sociocultural domains. Immobile fathers subscribe to a modified male provider ideal. Most male respondents take on infant care out of necessity because their exclusion from the domestic and international labor markets compels them to support female migration, and because they cannot afford paid help. Once unencumbered by childcare during later stages in the life course, at-home fathers seek employment to establish their financial independence. Although these fathers are expanding the contours of masculinity to encompass childrearing, housework, and household budgeting, they maintain the importance of work in their selfhood that does not extend to femininity.

Furthermore, immobile fathers safeguard the sanctity of motherhood by deprecating the independent, outward-looking woman on the one hand, and by commending the altruistic mother, on the other. To foreclose a gender order in which men would no longer be socially dominant, Indonesia's female-headed transnational families reinscribe, rather than subvert, gender complementarity by retaining men's and women's respective roles in economic provision and family nurturance.

This study further contributes to theorizing working-class masculinities in the Global South. Postcolonial and intersectional feminist scholarship highlights how the interplay of racial, gender, class, and global inequities impedes the ability of marginal men to aspire to the hegemonic masculinity of Western and local elite men, while providing fertile ground for the development of subordinated masculinities (Hoang 2015; Ray 2021). I add to this discussion by incorporating a relational perspective of gender that foregrounds the interactions of low-income men with women and *other* men as constitutive of masculinities. Bringing cultural sociology in conversation with the sociology of gender, I uncover boundary work as a vehicle for men trapped by immobility to realize dignity. Do immobile fathers feel emasculated vis-à-vis transnational fathers? I find that immobile fathers bolster their masculinity not by comparing themselves to the more financially privileged migrant men, but to similarly situated non-migrant men. That transnational fathers are *not* the prime referents of boundary work is probably attributable to immobile fathers' recognition that they cannot live up to the dominant conception of breadwinning masculinity. Instead, immobile fathers espouse a pragmatic masculinity that is defined not so much by providership, but by their paid and unremunerated labor in the maintenance of transnational families.

Data Availability Statement

The data underlying this article cannot be shared publicly for ethical reasons. In compliance with Institutional Review Board requirements, the author endeavors to protect the privacy of individuals who participated in this study, most of whom are members of marginalized groups. Anonymized data can be shared on reasonable request to the corresponding author.

About the Author

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Appendix: Tables and Figures

Table 1. Demographic Information of Non-Elite Respondents by Gender

Demographic Information	Male (n=31)	Female (n=18)	Total (n=49)
Age at Interview (Years):			
18-25	2	1	3
26-35	12	7	19
36-45	9	7	16
46 and above	8	3	11
Educational Level			
Less than high school	11	10	21
High school diploma	14	7	21
Some college	4	0	4
Bachelor’s degree and above	2	1	3
Religion			
Muslim	28	14	42
Christian	3	4	7
Marital Status			
Single	3	0	3
Married or widowed	23	14	37
Divorced or separated	5	4	9
Post-Marital Residence			
Uxorilocality	14	-	14
Patrilocality	8	-	8
Neolocality	1		1
Did not state, was unmarried or divorced	8	-	8
Migration Experience			
No migration experience	3	-	3
Internal migration only	13	-	13
International migration	14	18	32
Did not state	1	-	1

Endnotes

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[1] Seasoned migrant domestics did not report being influenced by the gender ideologies of host societies, though some commented on Indonesian women’s stronger status than women in the Middle East and East Asia.

[2] Some migrant women I interviewed permitted their husbands to purchase the services of sex workers, even tolerating them to sire children with mistresses.