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# Circulating Children, Underwriting Capitalism: Chinese Global Households and Italian Fast- Fashion

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# Circulating Children, Underwriting Capitalism

## Chinese Global Households and Fast Fashion in Italy

by Elizabeth L. Krause and Massimo Bressan

This paper analyzes how kin-related values, norms, and practices become entangled in the hegemony of global supply chains. Our collaboration focuses on the Made in Italy fast fashion sector, where the ultimate flexible workers are Chinese migrants. We home in on a paradox: half of the births in this Italian textile city are to foreign women, yet once weaned many of these babies are then sent to China. This circulation of children gives rise to a host of new discourses and interventions on parenting from various institutions and experts. We develop and use an encounter ethnography framework to contrast the expert views of childhood circulation with those of immigrant parents. We argue that global households underwrite capitalism through noncapitalist elements that are integral to the economic organization that fast fashion requires. Parents find value in circulating children in its power to activate systems of reciprocity across kin, to create networked bodies across territories, to secure affective bonds across generations, and to free up time so as to enhance their ability to work and make money.

Inside the pediatric unit of the Ospedale Misericordia e Dolce, a prematurely born infant lay on the exam table. A pediatric neuropsychiatrist waved a toy rattle above the baby and monitored his responses. His youthful Chinese parents looked on. The mother asked about weaning. Through translation, the neuropsychiatrist referred the mother to the pediatrician, who soon entered the room and questioned the parents about their intentions.

"This baby isn't going to be sent to live with its grandparents in China, is he?" the pediatrician asked.

The mother replied that in fact she was planning to send her baby boy back to China in about 6 months. The pediatrician urged her to wait until the following New Year if possible, when the baby would be more than a year old, because if the doctors were going to help the baby, they needed some time. Being born premature, the baby was vulnerable.

This moment revealed a clash between Chinese migrant and Italian cultural norms regarding child-rearing. The clash derived from a globalizing world layered with tensions and connected to structural forces. The mother had taken the traditional 40 days' postpartum repose but had since moved back to living in a factory dormitory, producing garments for the fast fashion sector that invigorated the metropolitan landscape between Florence and Prato.

This encounter homes in on a paradox: more than half of the births in Prato, Italy, since 2009 had been registered to foreign women, yet once weaned many of these babies were being sent to China.<sup>1</sup> Scholars of migration have documented the circulation of children under a wide variety of circumstances (Chu 2010; Coe 2014; Ni Laoire et al. 2012; Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2002; Watson 1975; Zhang 2001). The value placed on kin ties and the desires as well as strategies to reproduce or sever them vary across time and place, as do the biopolitics of fertility, abandonment, foster care, and adoption (Fong 2011; Kertzer 1993; Krause and De Zordo 2012; Leinaweaver 2008, 2013a; Schneider and Schneider 1996). Contingencies of transnational care lead migrants to tap into global networks and make use of reciprocities to manage challenges of the life course (Coe 2016; Hochschild 2000).

What happens when kin-related values and norms become entangled in the hegemony of global supply chains? Supply chains have become intensely global, and the apparel sector is more rule than exception. Globalization has coincided with a rise in labor precarity and ongoing crisis, especially in southern Europe, as large firms have largely abandoned their commitment to managing labor. Outsourcing has emerged as the

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1. In the public health sector of Prato (ASL) in 2011 some 3,270 babies were born, and babies born to non-Italian citizens represented 53% of the total. Since 2009 the births of Italian women were less than those of foreign women. This growth was in no small measure due to a shift in recorded births from women of Chinese nationality, whose births made up 15.5% of the total in 2006 and 36.1% in 2011 (Bracci 2013). See also the polemic that arose when the first baby born in a new hospital was to a Chinese mother: <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/italia/1332113/Prato-la-prima-nata-nel-nuovo-ospedale-e-cinese-sulla-rete-si-scatenano-commenti-razzisti.html> (accessed August 20, 2018).

global common sense. Resources are gathered from a dizzying array of sources, and jobs are performed through diverse and at times surprising as well as horrifying arrangements. The goal, especially for lead firms, is to generate profits (Tsing 2015).

Mindful of global impulses toward accumulation, we argue that there is another important story to be told as families become entangled in global supply chains. In this paper we suture a crucial connection between kinship and economic activity. We articulate different yet related “circuits of migration” (Kofman 2012), namely, those related to labor and the family. Our purpose is to intervene and theoretically contribute to calls that question the “natural hegemony” of capitalism and challenge capitalocentrism: the fact that capitalist discourses dominate and shape our analyses, outlooks, subjectivities, and even desires (Gibson-Graham 2006). This throne status can no longer stand. Capitalism in ruins invents new playbooks. Capitalist commodities derive their value in part by drawing on and altering social relations embedded in noncapitalist activities, as Anna Tsing has keenly documented in her ethnography on the matsutake commodity chain, a highly valued mushroom that essentially begins and ends its life as a gift (Tsing 2013). We are not suggesting that Made in Italy garments begin and end their lives as gifts. We are, however, suggesting that these commodities are reliant on noncapitalist social relations, specifically, gifts in the context of generalized reciprocity that are given in the making and sustaining of cross-territory households. Even in the context of recent transnational joint ventures, Sylvia Yanagisako notes the persistent significance of kinship among Italian family firms that enter into collaboration with Chinese entrepreneurs. The ironic twist to the story is that, as she puts it, “the agents of Western capitalism—namely the Italian capitalist families—aspire to enrich and develop a cultural logic that does not fit comfortably into evolutionary models of capitalism” (Yanagisako 2013:82). Similarly, a logic among the Chinese in Prato manifests in the conditions for reproducing labor, which occur in the context of a demographic dynamic in which many parents who give birth in Prato then send their babies to China. This strategy reinforces flexible work regimes through the creation of households that span multiple generations and cross national borders.

The transnational movement between China and Italy has given rise to a host of new discourses and interventions on parenting from various institutions and experts as children move in and out of Italian health care systems, schools, and society. We make sense of the vocabularies that Chinese mothers and fathers use to portray the value gained or heartache endured from the transnational movement of children. We contrast the expert view of childhood circulation with those of immigrant parents. Placing these views in dialogue with one another allows us to interpret how diasporic families and individuals negotiate the terms of an intensely transnational world. We argue that the circulation of children underwrites capitalism, with specific advantages supporting the global supply chains involved in fast fashion. This generic term covers various types of products—from the cheapest apparel sold in open markets

to actual brands such as H&M or Zara—known for capturing and responding to current fashion trends and providing consumers with immediate gratification (Reinach 2005).

To make the case for the circulation of children, we bring into sharp relief the existence and significance of global households. We draw on an economist-geographer team’s definition of the global household as “an institution formed by family networks dispersed across national boundaries” (Safri and Graham 2010:100). Safri and Graham convincingly demonstrate that the global household has evolved into a formidable economic actor. They note a rise in international divisions of labor because global households afford flexible workers. In describing the household as a site of noncapitalist production, they refer to household members’ services of domestic work and care, services that account for as much as half of world economic activity. The coauthors make an essential move: they recast remittances as a “productive investment” rather than as resources that finance only consumption (Safri and Graham 2010:115). As such, they hint at the multiplier effect of remittances in terms of generating and distributing “significant monetized value.” They calculate the value of world gross household product as 80% of gross domestic product (GDP), so that if GDP is \$50 trillion, they estimate the world gross household product at \$40 trillion (in 2006 figures; Safri and Graham 2010:110).

We argue that global households not only are integral to the economic organization that fast fashion requires but also reveal its “other than capitalism” character (De Angelis 2007). It is “other than” in that the economic organization does not adhere to the straight scripts of a globalized economy. Contrary to expert and popular opinion in which the circulation of children and multiple caretakers are widely devalued (Cardarello 2015; Leinaweaver and Fonseca 2007), parents find value in circulating children, in its power to activate systems of reciprocity across kin, to create networked bodies across territories, to secure affective bonds across generations, and to free up time so as to enhance their ability to work and make money. That, after all, was the point of leaving home.

## Encounter Ethnography as Method

We have conceptualized an encounter ethnography framework to guide the investigation. In the legacy of anthropological scholarship, much has been written about encounters. The term is useful because it emphasizes experiences or processes that are at odds with one another, as in the phrases “colonial encounter” (Asad 1973), “development encounter” (Escobar 1991), “intercultural encounter” (Sahlins 2000), “clinical encounter” (Ferzacca 2000), “activist encounters” (Razsa 2015), and even “fieldwork encounters” (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009). Rather than leave encounters to the realm of theory or common sense, however, we nurture encounter ethnography as a theoretically informed methodological framework. We propose an orientation that places encounters as points of inter-

penetration and mediation at the center of the investigation, one that lends itself to be carried out on a local level yet with global sensibilities.

Specifically, this case study allowed for an up-close look at Prato as a “litmus test” of globalization and its triumphal assumptions (Baldassar et al. 2015:3). Ethnographic research revolved around several sites of encounter: (1) encounters concerning child health, migration, and return; (2) encounters related to local production sites and global forces; and (3) encounters involving public places, meetings, and events. When Krause first proposed encounter ethnography as a method, she imagined contexts that would expose jarring epistemological moments, as when expert and migrant forms of knowledge collide. Exposure is what the method is designed to enable. Unpredictability is what it comes to expect. The project reveals how such instances play out on the ground between institutions and migrants as well as between ethnographers and their subjects. This strategy allows for a focus on power-laden clashes between dominant and subordinate economies, epistemologies, social practices, ways of being, and moral orientations.

Furthermore, it lends itself to a “global power perspective.” Longtime scholar of transnationalism Nina Glick Schiller has asserted that scholars must highlight the common struggle, or in some cases common dehumanizing forces, that migrants and citizens face as they try to achieve social and economic justice as the cities in which they live are subjected to the forces of capital restructuring (see also Ambrosini 2007). In opposition to what has nearly become a gold standard of ethnography—that of the lone anthropologist going to several locations in pursuit of a multisited research project (Marcus 1995)—Glick Schiller has refreshingly called for a “locality analysis.” In some ways, this may seem like a return to the olden and golden days of anthropological study when ethnographers focused on one people bounded in one culture and one place. It is nothing of the sort.

A locality approach aims to work against reproducing separation and to rescale a given analysis; it forwards an agenda of placing “migrants and natives in the same conceptual framework” (Glick Schiller 2012:46). The strategy can help to avoid and even subvert so-called methodological nationalism, a common side effect of migration research that feeds nationalism with its unit of analysis of the ethnic group itself. Glick Schiller (2012) identifies such a framing as problematic in that it “obscures the effects of the global restructuring of capital on the population, both migrant and non-migrant, in a specific locality” (43). Thus, rescaling underscores the ways that migrants, too, are agents in “reshaping localities” and therefore “turns our attention to the relationships that develop between the residents of a place and institutions situated locally, regionally, nationally, and globally, without making prior assumptions about how these relationships are shaped” (Glick Schiller 2012:46). Combining relational and structural dimensions holds promise for realizing a global power analysis. As will become clear, the agency of migrants restructures a given locality as do global supply chains.

Indeed, encounter ethnography reveals two crucial dynamics. The first is the enduring centrality of families to this story and the ways in which hybrid economic forms articulate and matter for understanding sociocultural systems (Wolf 1982; Yanagisako 2002; Yang 2000); the second is the challenge of understanding how such forces manifest meanings and value besides those calculated in utilitarian terms so dear to that commodity-fetishizing, European “species” *Homo economicus* (Mauss 1990). Our method reveals the cultural logics of individuals sandwiched between kin and capitalist regimes as well as illuminates how concepts of family formation are generated and contested in this globalized economic sphere.

The project unfolded within the context of a transnational research team. A partnership between Italian, Chinese, and US researchers inspired collaboration at multiple levels. Krause as the principal investigator conceptualized its major contours in conversation with Italian anthropologist Bressan, whose contacts as president of the research institute Strumenti e Risorse per lo Sviluppo Locale (IRIS) included an established network of multilingual researchers, primarily Fangli Xu, whose mother tongue is the dialect spoken in Wenzhou, the prefecture-level city of origin for most of Prato’s citizens from China, but who is also fluent in Mandarin and Italian. The team collaborated to refine research design, interview protocols, ethics training and certification; identify key ethnographic sites; cultivate relationships and permissions with institutions; and recruit migrant subjects, which was slow initially due to fear and mistrust given their often-precarious status. We eventually exceeded our goal and obtained 41 digitally audio-recorded interviews with Chinese parents. Our interviews included nearly an equal number of firm owners and nonowners and revealed that both entrepreneurs and workers made use of transnational care networks. In addition, the team conducted another 21 interviews with Italians, including health care workers and others with connections to the Made in Italy sector.

Prato has witnessed dramatic changes in its urban, economic, and social fabric. To grasp local dynamics, Krause spent 220 days across seven trips between June 2012 and May 2015 carrying out painstaking ethnographic fieldwork. In addition to hospital-based ethnography, fieldwork included participating in cultural and political encounters related to immigration, the economy, and the arts; educator trainings and public health workshops; and exhibits and inaugurations, as well as observations at immigration offices, markets, factories, and wholesale settings. Krause volunteered at a summer Democratic Party festival in a municipality with an industrial zone that has transitioned from mostly Italian to mostly Chinese firms. The team cultivated networks with associations, cultural clubs, schools, and residents in two diverse neighborhoods as part of an action research project to address segregation and separation. Dubbed Trame di Quartiere, or “Neighborhood Plots,” this public anthropology initiative was part of a region of Tuscany project to strengthen local capacity to respond to economic crisis and improve the integration of immigrants who live and work in Prato. The team organized community-based activities, includ-

ing urban walking tours, a social photography initiative, and a 4-day digital storytelling workshop.

This paper draws on encounters as well as interviews with experts and parents. The aim is to grasp how families live globalization. We draw perspectives from immigrant parents who have direct ties to fast fashion and who have experience sending their children to China. Team-produced documents included field notes and transcriptions of interviews, which were translated and thematically coded (Bernard and Ryan 2010).<sup>2</sup> Analysis focuses on three major themes: the alienating tempos of fast fashion, a sense of inevitability, and a concern for children's well-being. Themes highlight parents' decisions to form global households. An analysis of far-flung families follows. The rescaled approach places kinship processes in the context of a global economy. All told, necessity, comfort, regret, and reciprocal relations animate the circulation of children.

### Transnational Families, Local Settings

How families transform, cope, and create value in the context of what is typically labeled global capitalism rests at the heart of this project. The province of Prato, Italy, serves as an ethnographic laboratory. This historic textile district hosts what is claimed to be Europe's most concentrated overseas Chinese community. Transnational migrants produce low-cost items for the fast fashion industry. Most are small family firms, with 10 workers on average. Some 5,230 firms were registered in the name of entrepreneurs of Chinese nationality in Prato's chamber of commerce; a total of 4,017 individual firms were registered in the manufacturing category of clothing, leather or fur, with the vast majority (3,424) being cut-and-sew firms (Caserta 2016). Such firms in Prato had surpassed the 2,500 garment-sewing enterprises listed with the Wenzhou Clothing Business Association in China (Wei 2011:243) and represented 45% of Prato's manufacturing activity (Povoledo 2013).

Prato ranked as the number one province in Italy in terms of the ratio of Italian to registered foreign residents and was reported as the province outside of China with the largest number of Chinese (Hooper 2010). In 2012 the province of Prato recorded a population of 248,477, of which 36,834 were classified as *stranieri* (foreigners). Thus, 14.8% of the resident population was classified as foreigners. This compares to a national level of 6.8% foreigners to the total population. Non-Italian residents in Prato have migrated from 118 different countries. The most numerous immigrant group has its origins in China. Registered Chinese immigrants account for more than 40% of resident foreigners. When Chinese without residency permits are included, estimates often double the 15,000 on record to 30,000 or more (Sambo 2013:106–108). Uncertainty exists about the actual numbers because of the dynamic coming and going of the population as well as so many living under the radar. It was commonplace for migrant workers to live in

makeshift dormitories in the factories where they work until a deadly factory fire in December 2013. Initial fallout was a bipartisan alliance, and the region of Tuscany allocated €12 million to crack down on workplace "illegality," from housing conditions and safety codes to residency status (Krause and Bressan 2014).

Chinese parents attribute transnational movement of children partly to complex regulations required to keep current their children's residence in Prato and not trigger the nightmarish paperwork associated with family reunification applications: thus, they must endure long lines and present their children in person to the *questura* (police headquarters) every 2 years. In addition, a sense of uncertainty about the future saturates their outlook. As a result, only rarely do these migrants self-identify as either temporary sojourners or permanent residents. The fallout from the financial crisis of 2008 intensified competition among fast fashion producers. Circulating children equates to a strategy of keeping options open and transnational networks active, not only for themselves but also for their children.

The circulation of Chinese children is by no means an entirely new phenomenon. In his pioneering study *Emigration and the Chinese Lineage*, James Watson (1975) observed the rapid change to child-rearing practices during 1965–1975 in connection with massive emigration from Hong Kong to London in which villagers primarily left to open or work in restaurants. Through a village census, he determined that approximately one-third of the children had overseas parents and were raised by their grandparents, another one-third of the children moved between Europe and Hong Kong and hence were "intermittently in the sole charge of their grandparents" (1975: 185), and the remaining one-third of the children were raised by mothers who had not migrated and had help of grandparents. Watson's study illuminated the challenges of socializing grandparents into this role of primary caretaking as well as the effects of fending off modernizing forces, through both the child-rearing and the remittances that allowed locals to "emulate some of the highest ideals of their cultural heritage" (1975:216). What his well-rendered study did not explore were effects of these practices, such as when overseas parents confronted different expectations where they had emigrated. The goal of encounter ethnography is to challenge assumptions that follow from drawing hard boundaries around cultures and to grasp complexities that arise from specific historical social formations. We seek to understand how practices that look old might have new meanings and new implications.

The Prato metropolitan area has witnessed regional, national, and transnational migrations during the past 70 years. The first two phases resulted in permanent transplants. A first phase of migration came on the heels of World War II, as peasants abandoned the Tuscan countryside. Residents with such roots make up about 30% of Prato's population. A second phase of migration occurred during the boom of the 1960s, as people from the Deep South left behind agriculture, bringing Southern habits and dialects and experiencing discrimination as they sought housing and employment. People of Southern Italian

2. We draw from one primary code, value of living in Prato, and a secondary code, circulation of children (Ryan and Bernard 2003).



heritage, long stigmatized in the Italian imagination as inferior—a status and a trope that Italian state formation reinforced, Cesare Lombroso’s criminal anthropology underwrote, and Edward Banfield’s “amoral familism” reinscribed—now make up about 12% of Prato’s population (Bressan and Tosi Cambini 2009). In a third phase, especially since the 1990s, transnational migrants have come onto the scene. They comprise about 17% of the population in the city and 15% in the province. The majority originates from China, with most born in Wenzhou of the province of Zhejiang (83.4%) or Fujian (13.2%). These migrants view southern Europe as a “frontier of highly developed economies” (Pieke 2004:2). Unlike the old migrants, new immigrants are noncitizens and typically incur debt to enter the European Union. Like the old migrants, they bring networking and labor strategies moored in a family model (Ceccagno 2009; Denison et al. 2009; Lem 2010).

Historically, the success of the Made in Italy brand was attributed to small Italian family firms lauded for their flexibility. Less celebrated is the history of an informal economy characterized by unwritten contracts, clandestine work, and networks grounded in Old World sensibilities of secrecy, trust, and reciprocity. These long-standing practices persist, yet the status quo has changed in the context of economic crisis (Dei Ottati 2009). Workers have intensified ways of being flexible. Rampant fear of a Chinese “siege” has spread (Pieraccini 2010) and subsequently been challenged (Berti, Pedone, and Valzania 2013). We situate Chinese immigrants’ strategies in three structural encounters, each at a different level of scale: a Chinese regional model of economic development saturated with an exuberant ritual economy, a local Italian environment of small firms connected to the Made in Italy brand, and a global restructuring of the clothing industry. These encounters shape migrant experiences and reveal complex meanings behind practices such as the circulation of children. Without awareness of the structural encounters, the meanings tend to remain elusive, particularly in institutional contexts.

### Encountering Experts

Banners decorated the corridor of Mazzoni Middle School. Chinese ideograms scripted in black contrasted with Italian words written in red: 希望 paired with *speranza* (hope), 友谊 with *amicizia* (friendship), and 中国 with *cina* (China).<sup>3</sup> The art reminded visitors of the diverse student body. Krause found her way into the lecture hall along with about 30 educators and health care workers, mostly women, who had come to listen to a 3-hour afternoon seminar with Roberto Bertolino, a psychologist from the Frantz Fanon Center in Turin. The theme focused on the paradoxes and problems confronting immigrant children. With a text-rich PowerPoint show of 56 slides, Bertolino set the stage to transmit ideas for creating conditions to help immigrant adolescents, particularly those suffering from the dehumanizing psychological effects of racism and colonial domination.

Bertolino quoted directly from the Martinique-born psychiatrist Fanon, reminding the audience of the insight from *Black Skin, White Masks*: that the black man is never simply a man but is always marked as “other” in relation to the unmarked white man. This expresses the concept of double consciousness, which W. E. B. Du Bois so powerfully described more than a century ago, that “peculiar sensation” of “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois 1994 [1903]:2). In a similar way, the immigrant also always stands in relation to the citizen as society’s other. The immigrant is marked by a “double absence,” a condition in which absence is always a flaw that renders the immigrant suspect (Saada 2000). In the context of Chinese immigrants to Prato, absence takes on heightened and contested meanings as parents circulate their children to live with caretakers far away and thus contend with the absence of their children in terms of their own emotions and others’ judgments. Absence must also be understood in the context of a broad crisis of citizenship. Varying legal statuses profoundly define the contours of absence.

For educators to correct this sense of absence is no simple matter. Bertolino criticized current approaches to intercultural education for what he described as “the pedagogy of couscous,” that is, addressing the complexities of cultural diversity through celebratory and trivial approaches based on cross-cultural cuisines. He called for attention to the links among colonialism, migration, and education, and he underscored the problem of structural violence—violence that systematically writes itself on immigrant minds and bodies yet becomes normalized and often invisible (Fanon 1967; Giordano 2011; Scheper-Hughes 1992).

Bertolino’s empathetic stance captivated listeners until he brought up challenges. Immigrant parents often find themselves in an uncomfortable situation of “hierarchical inversion,” one in which they lose their authority. Their children may become distanced from them in part as the children grow more at ease than their parents with local ways of speaking and behaving. In such situations, he said, parenting is no longer possible.

At this suggestion, one audience member—a Chinese gentleman wearing a traditional Mao suit—took the floor and objected passionately to the stereotype. He insisted that Chinese children do listen to their parents. His intervention then turned to another issue, security blitzes (a.k.a. factory raids). They fill Chinese people with fear. Families leave Prato. Lives are disrupted. Children suffer. “What does this serve?” the Chinese man asked. He offered answers: that the children are afraid and that they suffer, both from fear and from the fact that the families commonly leave Prato, thereby increasing disruption. As his intervention continued for more than 7 minutes, audience members began to stir in their seats, murmur loudly, speak over him, and finally insist that he give the floor back to the guest speaker.

The crackdown on undocumented workers was a prominent feature in the tenure of Roberto Cenni, Prato’s mayor from 2009 to 2014. His victory signaled a lurch to the political

3. The Chinese words were *xi wang*, *you yi*, and *zhong guo*.

right as citizens elected their first center-right coalition mayor since the fall of Italian fascism. A textile and garment entrepreneur who had transferred his own failing firm to China, Cenni ran his successful bid on a blatant anti-immigrant campaign, specifically capitalizing on fears of a “Chinese invasion” (Donadio 2010).<sup>4</sup> He lost his second bid in 2014 just after factory inspections had been fortified with financing from the center-left region of Tuscany in light of the deadly factory fire.

As the psychologist resumed his presentation, he agreed that the children’s pain was of the greatest concern. The Chinese audience member had offered the perfect segue. Bertolino described a practice now “fairly in vogue” among Philippine and Chinese migrants, “the dangerous practice, very dangerous,” of sending children back to their own country. Bertolino acknowledged that the parents sought to enculturate their children, to make them “Chinese” so to speak, but that the children ended up being *orfani ovunque* (orphans everywhere) and cited a Parisian colleague who has used the concept of *morte psichica* (psychic death) to describe such children. Bertolino called on his audience members: “We need to help these parents to negotiate different strategies.”<sup>5</sup>

Bertolino’s call to arms was moving and resonated with the audience. The image of children wandering around in states of psychic death was terrifying. It was tempting to accept Bertolino’s call, with his alarms of a dangerous parenting strategy and its slippery slope into pathology. The psychologist’s observations carried weight. He was the expert. When he framed migration as a vehicle for transmitting trauma, his words resonated with the Italian educators. The Chinese gentleman’s objections bordered on being a nuisance. The two men’s positions contrasted as dramatically as their dress: the one in a blue pullover and khaki pants, the other in a Mao suit. They spoke past each other. That day, only one message got through: the expert’s.

The encounter gave us pause for several reasons. Was it not obvious that sending children far away from their parents was a bad idea? The commonsense reply would be, yes. The prevailing view in Italy, particularly among educators, politicians, and health care workers, was that the transnational circulation of children was a negative and harmful practice. From a doctor’s, nurse’s, or psychologist’s position of trying to alleviate suffering or a teacher’s position of wanting to educate immigrant children, this outlook seems reasonable. Health care workers recount specific cases of how much time and effort it takes to build a little trust in parents and to convince them to pursue treatment for children—*all’inizio si fa fatica* (in the beginning, it’s exhausting); then it becomes impossible to treat patients if they do not return for follow-up care. Many practitioners through facial expressions, gestures, and words expressed disappointment as they shared recollections of children

being sent to China midcourse during a treatment. Others told stories of children returning to Italy to find long waiting lists and not being able to get adequate therapy or get scheduled back into the regimented cycles of care. In light of a client not presenting, one psychologist explained, “I did all the preparatory work, and then it was pointless.” A neuropsychiatrist expressed the difficulty of explaining to parents what she, as a practitioner, believed would be helpful to the child but felt that her explanations were lost on the adults. Across the board, practitioners noted the limited availability of cultural mediators or translators. Even so, another expressed frustration over the “limited investment” that the Chinese parents devoted to learning Italian. While several acknowledged their own efforts to learn Chinese, the speech therapist called for “increased integration, a greater openness, but instead, I feel a lot of closed-mindedness. . . . But maybe if they don’t have time for their children, they don’t have time to learn Italian.”

Educators expressed difficulties teaching students who move between China and Italy and do not understand lessons because of language or absenteeism. As one school director with a significant Chinese immigrant student body expressed, “I think that the big problem is in the fact of this continuous migration.” Expectations are for stability and continuity, and such characteristics are associated with certain types of families, living together in one place, with attachment and bonding ideally between mother and child, as prefigured in Renaissance paintings and sculptures that adorn churches, museums, and even intersections. Yet not so very long ago, in the late nineteenth century, the historic province of Florence witnessed its own circulation of children, as straw weavers who were certified as lacking milk received state subsidies to pay wet nurses to care for their infants on the one hand and as professional wet nurses abandoned their own children to serve the babies of elite women on the other (Krause 2009). Perspectives such as that of Bertolino, as expressed poignantly in that singular moment, fail to consider the economic constraints and care strategies of the people who are living under them. Indeed, how do transnational families live this variety of globalization?

## Encountering Parents

The half-joking refrain among Chinese parents, “I went overseas and earned a child,” plays on the multiple meanings of the verb “to earn.” It at once references the fact that the Chinese immigrants work hard, earn money, and in the process grow their family. Chinese immigrants often laugh when they utter this phrase because it pokes fun at their own common tendency to calculate actions in monetary terms. The phrase also references the relatively greater reproductive freedom that Chinese parents acquire in leaving China because they are more or less outside of the purview of the one-child policy. Even if the policy is much less coercive than in years past (Greenhalgh 2003), parents who have two or even three children in Italy do not face the medical costs of child-bearing or possible fines that they would in China (Johnson 2014). The phrase also hints at the importance that Chinese immigrants place on family

4. See also “Biografia del Sindaco Roberto Cenni”: <http://www.comune.prato.it/trasparenza/storico-legislatura2009-2014/governo/sindaco/htm/biografia-cenni.htm> (accessed August 20, 2018).

5. In Italian, Bertolino said, “Dobbiamo aiutare questi genitori a negoziare strategie diverse.”

and social networks, and children are one way to enhance those affective bonds. As one parent of a child in China told us about her decision to migrate and send her children to live in China, “In terms of the advantages, the only thing that makes you feel alright is to think that in this way they can give some company to the old folks, dad and mom, so that they’re not too alone.”

Young parents do not necessarily set out to create a global household. As life unfolds and social relations become entangled with global supply chains, strategies emerge to fit circumstances, often not foreseen. One mother’s story reveals the contours as well as the trajectories that led her and her husband to extend their household in a global direction.

Wenling’s beautiful smile and her calm disposition belied her mothering of 3-month-old twins and the mountains she has climbed. That June 2013 day, she carried an iPhone with a pink case and Disney ringtone and was dressed in trendy youthful clothes: a yellow netlike shirt over a black camisole, black leggings, and espadrille wedges with turquoise straps. She agreed to an interview after leaving the bustle of the hospital exam room with a good prognosis for her babies. She, research assistant Xu, and Krause found comfort in seats in a waiting area nook.

Wenling had two older sons living in China. This is neither a tragic nor a triumphant story but rather one that involves unanticipated hardship, adaptation to work rhythms, motivations for sending children back, and flourishing networks of care and remittances. Her experiences echo those of so many others, which we thematically tease out and amplify below.

In 2003 Wenling’s mother told her to leave, and she didn’t think twice about it. She was 20 years old. She listened to her parents’ friends who said that Italy was a land of opportunity—you could earn well there—and a friend of her father’s had already migrated and was living in Italy. She had no idea what she was in for when she boarded a plane for Moscow. Once there, she climbed mountains, stayed in underground mountaintop cottages for days, and then spent 2 months traveling in a truck. Grueling travel sparked romance. “We met each other while we were coming here illegally,” she says of the man who would become her husband. “An illegal trip,” she adds, laughing. She stayed for another 6 months in the Czech Republic. Eight months later, at a cost of more than €10,000 (¥100,000), she finally settled in Vicenza. “The one who organized the trip had told my mother that we would fly as far as Moscow, then we would have walked a bit, and the trip in the car would have been quick,” she recalled. “Nobody had any idea that it was going to be like this.”

Unexpected conditions also awaited her in the garment sector. She had done a little factory-line work back in China but usually only for a few hours a day. Life was low-key. In Italy, she became all too familiar with an inverse work-to-sleep ratio. In China, she worked 4 or 5 hours a day; in Italy she slept 4 or 5 hours. Ironically, she adjusted to the rhythms, little by little, only once she had her son in 2006. The baby slept at night for 7 or 8 hours while both parents worked. During the day, she and her husband took turns caring for the baby and sleeping: “He would sleep 4 hours and then I, too, 4 hours.” The baby

was always with them, never in anyone else’s care: “He’s always been with me, staying with us is better,” Wenling said. The couple lived in dormitory-style housing that the employer provided in the factory. Their boss allowed them to keep the baby with them, apparently an exception to the rule, in part due to the couple’s having been introduced by friends who knew the owner and in part from the fact that the two of them worked quickly, she said, like the other workers: “What two people were doing, we also were doing.”

They did not have the option of enrolling the infant in childcare because they did not have residency permits at the time and hence were disqualified, and it also was not logistically easy to take him to school. In 2009 her husband managed to obtain amnesty, and in 2010, when her husband went to work for an Italian-owned firm, she was able to acquire a residency permit under a family unification clause. The family’s experience of moving from an illegal to a legal status reminds us how such statuses are both arbitrary, unpredictable, and constraining. The legal structures prohibited the couple from being able to take advantage of childcare. By the time her second son was born in 2011, Wenling found herself puttering around more than working and the next year decided to take the boys back to China. At the time of the interview, her sons had been back in China for a little less than a year. The 7-year-old son was living with his paternal grandmother; the 2-year-old son was living with his aunt, her husband’s sister-in-law. (Her father and father-in-law were deceased.) The couple sent money to both his mother and her mother to help with living expenses and medicine.

“At the beginning I missed them a lot,” she said. “I wasn’t used to it, all of a sudden, I couldn’t manage. It was like in a flash there was so much silence around me, there was nothing with me, I had always had them with me, I had been with the older one for 7 years.” And then she stopped herself: “There were not other alternatives.”

“Why did you choose to take them back to China?” Fangli asked.

“If you are in Italy for a long time and you’ve earned nothing, always with the babies, always with the babies, you’ve earned nothing,” Wenling explained.

She returned to Prato and got pregnant, thought about having an abortion, but then learned she was carrying male and female twins—viewed as rather rare—and decided to go through with the pregnancy. Perhaps the twins would also be China-bound. She could not say yet. But she was convinced that the Chinese approach to education yielded brighter children.

In the next three sections we delve into the significant ways in which the tempos of fast fashion, a sense of inevitability, and a concern for children’s well-being shape families’ decisions to have children participate in migratory circuits.

### *Tempos*

Fast fashion is, well, fast, and it requires the workers to be fast, too. Typically, both parents work. Hours are reportedly long, often 12–16 across day and night, and well beyond what Ital-



ian labor laws permit. Pay is commonly by the piece, so that the faster workers cut and sew, the more they can earn. In response to describing their decision to send their young children away or leave their older children behind, parents spoke of time shortages: "There is not enough time," "We even don't have enough time to sleep," "We cannot find a way to arrange our time," or "I don't have time to talk with him, to help him, or teach him."

Immigrant accounts of labor histories reveal alienation due to the rhythms of fast fashion work on the one hand and strong articulations between kin networks and capitalist markets on the other. Nearly all of those we interviewed spoke of coming to Italy through some kind of kinship network—either a direct relative such as a parent, sibling, cousin, aunt, or uncle or a relative of a neighbor. Transnational kin networks strongly determined destinations. As migrants assumed debt to go abroad, they found themselves in a sort of trap in which the investment constrained them to accept certain working conditions in order to repay their debt. Some spoke of this as a burden, others spoke of it casually, as like any other debt, something that could be paid off in 6 months or spread out over a couple of years.

Despite kin networks that softened their experiences in theory, there were poignant memories of alienation in practice. Peng described a "fistful of tears" related to the challenging working conditions and rhythms that he faced as a novice garment worker in training. Immigrants did not anticipate the conditions. Dao-ming said, "Who knew that once you arrived here it would be like this, that you'd work so hard? We just didn't know." Interviewees described deep feelings of alienation linked to a life reduced to work, sitting long hours at work stations, and collective listlessness. As Mei put it: "Staying here, people tend to become more apathetic, always doing the same thing, always the same, they don't have changes. Most people have this sensation, that staying here stiffens the brain."

A recurring refrain was the expression of alienation not only from the tempos of work but specifically from living in Prato. Although they found comfort in having many other Chinese people around them, they also deeply felt the anger and racism directed at them. Many recounted experiences of being robbed and mugged. They expressed fear and vulnerability. Time and again, interviewees said that discrimination in Prato was far worse than in other cities where they had lived in Italy or in Europe. An adult son and his mother who had finally managed to own their own firm balked at the suggestion that things must be better for them now:

"That's still nothing," Ming, the adult son, said of firm ownership.

"Nothing, we are still bullied," echoed his mother, Yue-Sai.

The case of Giorgio sheds light on time and parenting from the perspective of an empathetic health care professional. At 7 months Giorgio was sent to China along with his older brother and in 2006 came back to Italy to attend preschool. A year later, in first grade, his parents brought him to Prato's public health agency, where child psychologist Anna Ascolti gradually had begun to see a growing number of Chinese parents and their children among her patients. Ascolti described the boy as a

"very intelligent" bilingual child who excelled in all subjects; he was exceptional in math and even had the highest possible score of 10 in Italian. But Giorgio was hyperactive and cried a lot in school. He was diagnosed with "severe scholastic discomfort." His case was similar to that of an Italian child who might be referred to her. The differences came with his transnational movement, relationship with his parents, and the little time they spent with him. He was given to an Italian woman from the time he was 1 month old. "So right from the start he had this separation," the psychologist said, adding that he was very attached to his brother, the only person he had been with his whole life, and he tended to listen to him more than his parents.

Once back in Italy, problems arose both at home and in school. "He breaks things, he obeys only if someone gets mad at him, he is never still," Ascolti said, voicing the father. During school lunch one day, the boy put a rope around his neck and said, "I want to die." After that, he always wanted to be close to the teacher, which Ascolti described as *bellino* (very cute). Sometimes when the parents would arrive late at school to pick him up, he would be waiting at the gate, calling out his own name, as though at the airport: "Giorgio, Giorgio. Is there someone who will pick me up? I'm here." Ascolti added that the family was meticulous, punctual, and collaborative. Like most Chinese parents she had treated, though, they put work before all else and so did not pay much attention to him at home.

During one visit, the boy drew a nativity scene surrounded by a blue sky, a smiling moon, a shooting star, and green grass. The scene was awash in yellow. In the center a baby lay in a manger under a ceiling light. A blond mother and brunette father kneeled on either side of him. Ascolti noted that he pictured himself as an Italian citizen, and she emphasized that he had placed himself at the center. At school, he also wanted to be the center of attention. Indeed, the best day of his life, she said, was the day he ended up in the hospital. He had fallen and cut his head, and the teacher had cuddled him, keeping him on her lap until his father arrived to take him to the hospital.

"He had gone to the hospital in the car with his dad, and the boy said that this had been the most beautiful day in his life," Ascolti said. "Everybody for him, he was so happy. It didn't matter one iota that to have all that attention, he had gotten a hole in his head."

During another visit, the psychologist had instructed Giorgio to play a game. "At a certain point, he made a slip of the tongue and said—instead—he meant to say that the dad did not buy him these toys because he didn't put them back in their correct places and he lost them. And instead of saying that he lost the toys, he said 'I am lost.' But I think that he really does feel truly lost. Indeed, he has very unstable bonds."

As problems persisted and the parents returned to meet with the psychologist, she recalled suggesting that they spend more time with their son. "And I told them, 'But don't you have even a bit of time for him, even 10 minutes, to play a bit with him, to read him a book?' They tell me, 'No, not even 10 minutes a day. Nothing.' That's exactly what they said."

Such encounters between Chinese parents and Italian health care workers give the impression of incommensurability in terms of parenting. In some ways, however, the fact that many migrant parents across our interviews also lamented the lack of time to spend with their children suggests that they do share basic assumptions but that they adopt radically different strategies to arrive at standards of care. In other words, many have embraced a global household strategy so as to realize family ideals—in ways that extend beyond Italian ideals of motherhood (Krause 2005). This widespread caretaking norm is one that children sense and internalize. This internalization happens as parents deal with intense time constraints (Ceccagno 2007). The global economic crisis of 2008 extended its reach into the main streets of Chinese fast fashion work and made competition even more cutthroat. The assumption that owners would have more free time than nonowners did not bear out in our research.

#### *Inevitability*

Many parents spoke of feeling constrained to send their children back to China. A theme emerged connected to a deep sense of necessity and inevitability. Parents used phrases such as “there is no other way,” “there is no other option,” or “we don’t have a choice, that’s life.” One father acknowledged that his wife was sad, adding, “She has to bear it, there’s nothing we can do.” Mei, the mother of a 10-year-old living with her grandparents, explained it like this: “The reason that we sent her back to China is not that we don’t like her, it’s because of our job and life, there is nothing we can do.” Chaoxiang, who worked his way up from producing clothes to owning a fast fashion firm, had three children with his wife: the oldest was born in China in 1997; the other two were born in Prato in 2005 and 2006. At the time of the interview, the children were 16, 7, and 6 years old. Only the youngest was living in Prato.

*Chaoxiang.* We separate ourselves from one another out of necessity. It’s hard to say if it’s regrettable or not, but to live together is impossible.

*Fangli.* But are you sorry?

*Chaoxiang.* Some regret, certainly, but being apart is also inevitable.

This profound sense of inevitability came up again and again as parents emphasized the conditions of their work. One parent used the words “vicious competition” to characterize Prato’s fast fashion scene in which the life of any given business is not long. Their own living conditions and rhythms of life as immigrants in Prato were often not conducive to raising a child. They expressed being less anxious having their children living with close relatives than trying to watch them directly in the factory.

#### *Well-Being*

Long-distance arrangements were seen as in the best interest of the child and the family writ large. Several parents described sorrow at the thought of missing out on milestone moments, but they reasoned that this was a small sacrifice compared to the advantages. Ultimately, parents had the child’s welfare at heart.

Peng, a young man whose father sent him to Italy as a teenager to straighten him out and who eventually became a firm owner, got married, and had a family in Prato, reflected on his and his wife’s decision to send their son back to China to live with his parents. When the child came back to Prato for a visit, the boy seemed unhappy. “When he was here, I had to look after him in the factory. There is no place for him to go, he has to stay in the factory all the time. Now he is in China, he is very happy,” Peng reasoned. He went on to express the value of having the child live with his grandparents in China: “Both language and [living] conditions have their value. Here, when he [the baby] is here, it’s a hard time for his life. I saw some children in other people’s factory, they live like a cat, they roll on the floor and when they want to sleep, they would sleep in the cardboard.” Peng’s view of a child living “like a cat” is not intended to bring to mind a house cat that is treated like a member of the family. Rather, the association better translates to a stray animal that lives off back-alley scraps and could itself serve as a source of food for the family as opposed to being one of its members. Metaphorically, it conveys the sense that parents have to negotiate the best possible route of care under the circumstances and demands for über-flexible work. A sense of traditional intimacy also figured into decisions about the child’s welfare.

Parents often expressed a desire for their children to be raised in China so as to become Chinese. A strong desire for oral and written fluency of Chinese language played a major role. One father, Bo, described placing high value on “traditional intimacy,” a quality that children gained when they grew up in China close to grandparents and other relatives. In a non-Chinese environment, words and ways threatened to erode such qualities and produce a westernized child. Even so, he admitted to having mixed feelings about having his two children, a 4-year-old daughter and 1-year-old son, far away, saying, “Well, I am definitely distressed, no matter what. They are my children. But there is a good side to it and a bad side to it.” Bo’s children lived with their paternal grandparents, he sent back money as well as infant milk powder, and his parents hired a part-time nanny to help with childcare.

A strong pattern emerged around a preference to have kin as caretakers rather than non-kin. Many parents expressed fear at the thought of placing their children in the care of a stranger. Hospital health care professionals corroborated those fears, recounting tragic cases of shaken baby syndrome (a.k.a. abusive head trauma) that they believed had a higher rate of occurrence when infants were placed in the care of someone who was tending after numerous infants. Health concerns were one kind of well-being. Another had to do with emotional ties.

One mother expressed the sense of relief that came from her daughter being raised by family rather than a non-kin caretaker thusly:

*Mei.* We felt relieved as long as she lived with family. After all, there is affection between family members, that's—

*Fangli.* There is kinship.

*Mei.* It's very natural.

Benefits of kin caretakers included providing continuity across generations, maintaining ties, and keeping aging grandparents company. Parents expressed skepticism about placing their child in the care of a nanny in Prato. There was a widespread feeling that overseas migrants had come to make money and so could not be trusted to care for a child. Trustworthy nannies cost more than most workers could afford. Furthermore, parents expressed a sense of tranquility in having grandparents or close kin care for their children as opposed to strangers. At the same time, there were trade-offs in extending care across distant territories. Misgivings were frequently related to “firsts” having to do with a child's development. Reflecting on what she had lost or gained in sending her daughter to be raised in China for the early years, Ling noted the freedom she had gained and then added, “Lost—I would say to have lost the most important thing in having a daughter, I mean that type of contact between a mother and her child.”

Asked what she gained or what she lost from her immigration experience, Hui Li recounted her experience in almost poetic terms:

Speaking of advantages, yes, the only one is that we're now familiar with life abroad, while in China, we first thought that the moon was rounder in foreign places, that . . . that whoever left the country, or whoever returned home, was very glorious, it made a big impression. Now that I've experienced it, I can say that in reality, only you know how much roughness can hide behind that happiness.

### Far-Flung Families and Capitalist Entanglements

How do we interpret the entanglements of families with fast and flexible capitalism? With all due respect to Bertolino, his analysis is skewed through the hegemony of a global supply chain. The distortions of this hegemonic order render his clinical lens an isolated instrument, unmoored from economic structures and capital flows, and thus seduce him to pathologize behaviors linked to diaspora. We do not deny that the children of immigrants may suffer from moving around, that medical care may be interrupted, that children may long for their parents or vice versa, or that they may find transitions from one school to another to be disorienting. But we do question a blanket approach that disregards the existence of global house-

holds. Instead, we are suggesting a lens that allows for different ways of belonging and different ways of understanding globalization.

The circulation of children is not by necessity a dangerous practice that results in orphaned children who roam the world in states of psychic death. To challenge accusations of psychically dead children—a characterization that brings to mind armies of zombie immigrant youth—we seek to avoid naked cultural relativism. Parents, kin, and friends navigate the circulation of children and create global households that offer possibilities for children to get lost in the shuffle or to be well loved, nurtured, and enlivened through transnational networks.

Global households create value through networks in their own right. The themes of temporality, inevitability, and well-being can be understood to enact and enable different kinds of value. The Chinese migrants often signaled that they were not making money only for themselves. Reflecting on what she had gained and what she had lost from migrating, Ju, the mother from the opening encounter, replied, “Yes, there's an advantage. We have managed to earn a little money, we have brought it to my mother, as though one generation is finally earning a little something, right?”

We build on a locality analysis through encounter ethnography to note how global households create social, symbolic, and economic value across and through (1) kinship relations, (2) social networks, and (3) reciprocity as an expression of non-capitalism. The first leg of this conclusion pushes a nexus between global kinship and an economy reliant on global supply chains. The second leg extends the idea of dispersion as a resource. The third leg binds the two.

First, it is important to recognize the stability of kinship even as it appears unstable. We must locate the core of kinship not in place but in sentiment. In a provocative book-length essay, *What Kinship Is—And Is Not*, Marshall Sahlins reminds us that kinship has to do with “mutual relations of being” and “participation in one another's existence” (Sahlins 2013:ix). “Families,” he counters, “consider themselves as people who belong to one another” (Sahlins 2013:22). Families may also belong across territories. That does not make their relations of being any less mutual. Granted, relations become less quotidian. But there is still a strong aspect of mutuality and how they “know each other's doings and sufferings as their own” (Sahlins 2013:44–45). Sahlins's essay highlights the multiple ways in which being and belonging can be realized. It also offers a powerful corrective to scientific notions of kinship that reduce it to biology and also of the “egocentric anthropology of kinship” infused by Western individualism (Sahlins 2013:43).

Parents circulate their children between China and Italy, between Wenzhou and Prato, to the point that it has come to seem normal for many immigrant families. In engaging in this circulation, participants constitute kinship. That is not to say it is an easy practice—emotionally or legally. They must deal with visas and residency permits and a proliferation of rules and regulations related to crossing borders as well as staying put within them (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Nor is it merely

a timeworn traditional practice. Within the fast fashion niche, the circulation of children has become a coping strategy and one that we argue, in fact, strengthens mutual relations of being across territories and allows for close relatives to participate in the child's existence across generations.

Second, far-flung social ties may be cast in positive terms; dispersion may become a resource. Indeed, they may enhance what migration scholar Ma Mung describes as "inter-polarity of relationships, that is, the existence of relationships between the various poles of the diaspora" (Ma Mung 2004:219). Similarly, anthropologist Julie Chu's study depicts Chinese villagers waiting, with bags packed, to migrate. She emphasizes the importance of "webs of relations." Children are seen as "fundamental extensions of one's social possibilities and moral legacy as a networked body" (Chu 2010:95). They enhance and link people across mountains, oceans, continents—and markets. Measuring the experiences of Chinese immigrants against a European/Western norm of the family risks ignoring the realities of what a flexible labor force and entanglements with global supply chains mean in the context of globalization. Chinese parents send their children to China not merely to socialize them into Chinese cultural habits and outlooks as well as educational approaches but also to create networked bodies and meanwhile negotiate the demands of being flexible workers in a fast economy.

Third, transnational families pursue a mix of economic strategies as they work in global commodity chains. Mauss's classic essay *The Gift* takes on new meaning in an intensely globalized context. Its original political intervention exposed the free marketers of the day and their restricted, utilitarian, and individualistic view of humans as naturally and narrowly inclined to engage in cold calculation rather than collaboration at every turn. Through unmasking the spirit of the gift, he aimed to revalue archaic practices that were still widely used but were often not seen as mattering to modern economic activity and life. The work inspired investigations across a range of societies (Godelier 1999; Graeber 2001; Strathern 1988; Sykes 2005) and gave way to one of Sahlins's (1972) classic insights, the notion of a "spectrum of reciprocities": generalized, balanced, and negative. Generalized reciprocity, giving without taking account of how much is taken with the sense that in the future something will be given back, most closely describes what comes into play in the context of the Chinese immigrant workers' circulation of children.

This reciprocity-rejuvenated argument complements the placement of the global household into a diverse economies framework in which "heterogeneous noncapitalist economic activities coexist with capitalist ones" (Safri and Graham 2010: 103). Even in the context of Wall Street investment banking, anthropologist Karen Ho convincingly reminds us of the resilience of kin networks and warns that "framing kinship and family as dichotomous with, or external to, the very processes of capitalist formation ignores the centrality of the connections and sentiments of kinship that make capitalist production possible" (Ho 2009:13). Transnational families pursue a mix

of economic strategies as they engage in activities rooted in global capitalist markets. We reincarnate the insights of Mauss regarding the stubborn persistence of gift economies even in modern economies. Gift economy practices and principles—the obligations to give, to receive, and to reciprocate—establish, confirm, maintain, and even ruin relationships (Mauss 1990). They have deep social, moral, and economic consequences and continue to operate in intensely globalized economies.

Thus, what if instead of viewing circulation as an inevitable consequence of global capitalism, as a dubious or even pathological form of parenting, or even as a case of cultural relativism—it is just what the Chinese do, it is their culture—we were to view it as part of the broad variety of diverse economic activities that coexist with and even underwrite capitalism? Fast fashion could not exist, the prices could not exist, the market could not exist without the global household and practices of reciprocity. When such important aspects are left out of analysis, we have understood very little about the economy or the social relations that undergird it. Sustaining the global household is key to the fast fashion economy—how it works and how to understand it.

Kin networks articulate with capitalist activities in significant ways. Parents seek strategies to find the best care possible for their children given structural constraints. Pursuing migrant success becomes not only an individual undertaking but also an extended-family endeavor. We have highlighted how parents activate relations of reciprocity, how their strategies create in themselves and their children networked bodies, and how they distribute affective bonds across borders and generations. Material and immaterial values activate relations, beliefs, and sentiments across transnational spaces and create diasporic memories, connections, and histories between global households. Under intensified twenty-first-century globalization, so-called flexible capitalism articulates with noncapitalist activities and not only encourages but also relies on far-flung family formations.

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## Comments

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This paper addresses the long-standing anthropological interest in the relationship between kinship and economic activity. While the authors do not engage directly with this literature, their analysis speaks to Polanyi's (1944) central concern with the "embeddedness" of systems of reciprocity and households in market economies and contributes to critiques of neoliberal economics and free-market globalization (e.g., Dale 2010). The paper explores how the kin-related values, norms, and practices of Chinese (Wenzhouese) labor migrants in Italy become entangled in the hegemony of global supply chains of the fast fashion industry. As the title makes clear, the key argument is that by "circulating children"—arguably the most precious of "noncapitalist elements"—their highly exploited migrant worker parents are "underwriting capitalism" and that the "global households" created by these communities are integral to the economic organization, as well as the migration regimes, that fast fashion requires.

The noncapitalist value in circulating children, which involves sending children back to China to be cared for by grandparents and other kin, includes "its power to activate systems of reciprocity across kin, to create networked bodies across territories, to secure affective bonds across generations, and to free up time so as to enhance [the parents'] ability to work and make money." As the authors point out, the practice of leaving children in the care of kin is common to many households across the globe and certainly featured in the history of this particular receiving area (cf. Krause 2009), the difference being that the contemporary informal carers are living thousands of miles away. On the other side of this hard-won coin are the capitalist elements; the long and gruelling work days and lack of time, which make caring for one's own children an economic burden few can afford. The paper's analysis of "the cultural logics of individuals sandwiched between kin and capitalist regimes" is increasingly relevant in the context of global migration trends, including the phenomenon of transnational care chains (Yeates 2012) and the expansion of temporary migration schemes and visa restrictions that create what Guy Standing (2011) has called the precariat class.

Through their brand of "encounter ethnography," the authors deliver rich and heartfelt "thick description" of contrasting views on parenting. Indeed, the strength of the paper is in its juxtaposition and comparison of the conflicting perspectives that jostle to make sense of and evaluate the practice, both striking and familiar, of circulating children. After all, what could be more common than grandparents caring for grandchildren? Yet, what parent would not be challenged by sending children away? The normative Italian publics, including the medical and psychological fraternities, are quick to denounce the practice as harmful to families, particularly children, while the migrant parents explain that given the economic circumstances, this is the best option for them, their homeland kin, and especially the children. An area for further research that the paper implicitly raises relates to the perspectives of the children themselves, as well as of their homeland kin, which are possibly absent because the authors conducted their fieldwork in Prato alone. The authors build on the ideas of Mauss to argue that the practice of circulating children successfully "activate[s] systems of reciprocity across kin" and "networked bodies across territories" (my emphasis) in order "to secure affective bonds across generations" and "to free up time . . . to enhance [the parents'] ability to work and make money," but the detail of these transnational practices and processes is largely missing.

It is perhaps the authors' emphasis on the capitalist practices of the global economy that eclipses this transnationalism from below (Gardner and Grillo 2002), the everyday transnationalism of developing and maintaining reciprocities across distance. Applying a transnational migration (Levitt and de la Dehesa 2017) or a global care chains lens (Raghuram 2012; Williams 2010) may have provided a more even treatment of both processes. There are now a growing number of studies that describe the intensive activity of transnational caring between migrant and homeland kin made possible by the poly-media environments and the information and communication technology affordances that permit the delivery of care across distance (e.g., Baldassar and Merla 2014; Madianou and Miller 2013). What of the time devoted to the transnational practices of circulating children and the circulation of care that presumably results? How does this happen and when? How are bodies networked across territories and to what effect? These more quotidian and micro processes would have added a richer picture of the noncapitalist elements by also delivering the voices and experiences of the children and grannies themselves. What do they think of this particular relationship between kinship and economic activity? Or is it the case that these workers are so time poor that very little in the way of caring across distance takes place?

This said, the authors convincingly argue that the Made in Italy capitalist commodities are reliant on noncapitalist social relations, in particular, the generalized reciprocity of the informal care moral and kinship economy "made in China." Thus, the Made in Italy label hides a Chinese laborer and circulating children in transnational networks. While there is a

substantial literature on the migrant laborers leaving their children behind in the care chain, there are far fewer studies of migrant workers circulating children between sending and receiving areas. Even rarer are works that challenge the dominant normative ideal of proximate care to explain the cultural logics and economic and structural constraints that result in the circulation of children. The authors describe the ambivalence that parents feel about this practice but also compellingly explain the conditions that give rise to it, revealing “how families transform, cope, and create value in the context of . . . global capitalism.”

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### From the Infant's Point of View

For scholars immersed in migrant family lives, parent-child separation stretched across global households hardly raises eyebrows (e.g., Alipio, Lu, and Yeoh 2015; Graham et al. 2012). As my students of migration are wont to say, “family separation is the new normal!” The underlying concern in this essay appears to be less about child circulation than the very young age of the children being moved. Krause and Bressan deftly sketch the hand-wringing by social workers, schoolteachers, and activists about the impact of child circulation among Chinese migrants in Prato. The Italians concerned with mobile children may well have experienced or endorsed boarding school, fostering, transnational adoption, overseas study, and other forms of family separation in their own households. It is the immaturity of the child being sent away that seems to be a key issue for local advocates and perhaps for the ethnographers as well. It raises the question of whether the sense of dismay and judgment about this particular form of global householding would be as pronounced if the children were older.

From the sent-away infant's point of view, one hears the cacophony of voices above and over the infant's head, speaking entirely for her or him. As usual, children's voices do not factor into decisions about family mobility; the young are almost invariably spoken for in migrant families (Dobson 2009). What might the infant say were he or she asked? Such a question is not far-fetched among cultures where infants are viewed as potent social actors, their bodies sites for communicating and affirming values about religion, morality, and family (Gottlieb 2000). Infant bodies invariably communicate the importance of “skinship” (Tahhan 2008), the tactical, prolonged body work of feeding, cleaning, and cuddling, all of which require body-to-body contact (Butt 2017; Lupton 2013). Global capitalism may disrupt skinship. Does the infant in Prato get to breastfeed, or does bottle-feeding enable more rapid weaning and thus a more rapid departure of the infant back to China? Is there a minimum body weight, rather than age, at which weaning is

viewed as appropriate? The availability of baby formula, free infant travel, disposable diapers, warm clothing, discount airplane tickets, and other commodities makes for an easy transfer of skinship work from biological parent to another household member in another country.

Sahlins (2013) might view this pattern of infant mobility as skinship in service of kinship. Families send infants home to enact a larger project of joint mutuality of kin. A system of kinship gives newborn children a value in the social world (Shryock 2013). As such, in Sahlins's view, the infants sent home legitimate a particular social value. But the social value expected, one of “mutuality of being,” seems thin on the ground because of the importance of the various objects, material conditions, and infrastructures necessary to create and maintain mutuality of being across continents. It's not clear how kin values enacted in global households can be separated from capitalism. The commodification of many facets of pregnancy, birth, and child-rearing worldwide sets the scene for the conditions of infant mobility. It is no more pernicious an inroad of global capitalism into the work of skinship than is widely present in other forms elsewhere. Recently in Canada, for example, a couple who used in vitro fertilization to get pregnant then lost their 5-month-old son in a tragic household fire. They viewed their dead child in commodity terms: “Having Hunter was a \$50,000 expense. We loved him to the moon and back. He was our most prized possession,” the father cried (CTV News 2017). When affluence makes it easy to rent a surrogate womb, adopt an infant, elect surgical childbirth, and hire 24-hour nannies for infant care, all in the name of kinship and family, why is sending a baby home to grandparents objectionable? What really appears to be at issue, alongside the infants' age, is circulation. A sedentary bias pervades the reasoning of the activists and social workers. They privilege child-rearing in place and denigrate mobile parenting practices (see also Butt, Beazley, and Ball 2017). From the infant's point of view, it arguably does not matter much where skinship takes place as long as it occurs. Enacting sociality through the body takes commitment. Reinforcing kinship through skinship is tedious, demanding, and ultimately uncertain work. Someone has to change the diapers. It's dirty work. Who even has the time anyways?

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“Circulating Children, Underwriting Capitalism: Chinese Global Households and Fast Fashion in Italy” is an engaging and important contribution—ethnographically and conceptually. There is a lot to treasure in it, and it leaves room for further conversations about concepts and comparison.

Juxtaposing the points of view of immigrant Chinese textile workers, their children, and the Italian pediatric psychology experts seeking to “protect” them, Krause and Bressan explore

how immigrant families cope with unrelenting demands for “flexible” workers within global capitalism—whether as those who sell their labor to others or as entrepreneurs struggling to survive in a highly competitive industry (and in a foreign land). Through their adaptations to this environment, Chinese transnational families involved in Italy’s fast fashion industry transform and create value.

Krause and Bressan paint vivid scenes of encounters, for example, at a pediatric clinic visit, a seminar on immigrant children held for educators, meeting a spouse during a long and clandestine journey from China to Italy, and building a growing fondness for a maternal grandmother. The authors include stories that are neither tragic nor triumphant, avoiding sensationalism to give us a real sense of the texture of global family life as well as of working conditions in the fast fashion sector in Italy.

Krause and Bressan reveal the emotionality of alienation among newly arrived Chinese immigrant textile workers and the emotional sacrifices—and gains—that parents and children make when geographically separated from each other. They also demonstrate that Italian “experts” (educators, child psychologists, pediatricians) and Chinese immigrant parents may share some basic assumptions about the importance of spending time with one’s child but differ on appropriate strategies to arrive at these standards of care. Through their rendering of various scenes and life histories, Krause and Bressan illuminate the conditions from which these different strategies emerge.

We learn that parents find value in transnational child circulation beyond its utility as a coping strategy. Chinese immigrant parents say that they “earn” a child, because children are one way to build networks with and beyond family. Echoing Africanist work on fostering and lateral networks (Alber, Martin, and Notermans 2013; Coe 2014; Guyer 1994), the authors argue that dispersion is a resource, that remittances and “stipends” for raising children are productive investments, and that transnational child circulation is a noncapitalist activity that coexists with and underwrites global capitalism.

Drawing on anthropological conversations involving other world areas allows us to think further about five concepts the authors employ to uncover the social relations of global capitalism: child circulation, global households, networks, belonging, and encounters.

I am left curious about the contours and contexts of child circulation between Chinese places of origin and Italian places of destination. Krause and Bressan note that migration scholars have documented child circulation under a variety of circumstances. As a scholar of Africa and African diasporas, I draw on Africanist examples to pose further questions. Child circulation does not occur only in situations of rural to urban and/or international migration. For example, rural Cameroonians have for at least a century considered child circulation to foster strong and flexible psychological orientations in children. This leads me to ask whether there is a historical precedent for child circulation from Wenzhou, China. If so, how did circulated children, their parents, grandparents, and other kin conceptualize this form of distributed parenting (e.g., as a

strategy to cope with economic hardship, a way to build networks, or a form of character building)? How did these conceptualizations change over time? And, while Krause and Bressan cite many instances of transnational child fostering, what about situations in which migrants rarely turn to this option? Political economic conditions (e.g., the availability and affordability of childcare and the implementation of immigration law) as well as shifting cultural expectations (e.g., toward nuclear family models in which parents raise their own children) may make child circulation rare (Feldman-Savelsberg 2016) or unidirectional (Kamga 2014).

These variations in child circulation are one among several forms of exchange that hold together transnational families. Calling these families “global households” (following Safri and Graham) blurs the often productive distinction between kinship networks and household as residence group (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950; Stack 1974), but the sense of a network of kin-based emotions and exchanges stretching over time and space is compelling. I wonder how kinship networks do or do not intersect with other forms of network ties (e.g., with co-workers, neighbors back home, friends, or relationships built with non-Chinese immigrants and/or with Italian “experts”). To what extent are these ties epiphenomenal of work environments and routine institutions (Small 2009), and to what extent are they purposefully, strategically sought after and built up (Astone et al. 1999)?

Krause and Bressan imply that Chinese parents strategically enlarge their children’s networks, molding their children into “networked bodies” within global commodity (and labor) chains. Invoking Mauss, they remind us that the “gifts” circulating through these networks not only establish and maintain relationships but can also ruin them. Cole and Groes’s (2016) notion of affective circuits reminds us of the stop and start quality of economic strategies and exchanges, how they go along with other forms of exchange, and—as evoked by Krause and Bressan’s case studies—how these exchanges are infused with emotion.

These exchanges help family members belong to one another (Sahlins 2013) across territories. Belonging is an expansive term referring to both relatedness and feelings associated with kinship, place, and citizenship. It deserves some analytic precision (Feldman-Savelsberg 2016:8–11), enriched by Krause and Bressan’s examples. Belonging can be imposed (when Italian experts categorize Chinese fast fashion workers as citizens or noncitizens and as good or bad parents) just as it can be sought out (e.g., by yearning to belong to the middle class). Chinese immigrants in Prato perform belonging when they claim rights (e.g., to recuperate children temporarily sent to China), fulfill duties (sending stipends for their children’s well-being), and take steps to ensure that their children are socialized into Chinese cultural and educational orientations. Different dimensions and types of belonging may—depending on context—either complement or contradict each other. Managing this complex knot of belonging in the context of an utterly exhausting pace of work can drive an immigrant to a “fistful of tears.”

Finally, just like belonging, “encounters” in “encounter ethnography” seem to have several aspects. They are interactions among people as well as among differing orientations and frames of interpretation. The carriers of these orientations toward the world (or toward families, migrants, Chinese-ness, and Italian-ness) and the settings of the encounter are also important elements of an encounter ethnography. In addition, the authors use “encounter” to describe juxtapositions that they create among various scenes. Because these encounters are so varied, I am left with some questions regarding how best to conceptualize encounter ethnography and what the authors aim to propose for the rest of us. These questions range from the practical to the conceptual. What is encountering what, and who is encountering whom? Where do these encounters occur, and with what consequences? Should we use “encounter” literally or metaphorically? Is encounter ethnography a way of conducting ethnographic research, is it a form of analysis that enriches ethnography, or is it a method for revealing areas for and categories of analysis? I ask because I find Krause and Bressan’s “Circulating Children” utterly compelling, worthy to serve as a model for other work on global families and their conditions of labor and love.

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This article presents a nuanced analysis of the clash between the views of Chinese immigrants who aim to strengthen the flexible citizenship and transnational networks available to themselves and their children and the views of Italian child health professionals who aim to facilitate the assimilation of Chinese children into Italian society. Krause and Bressan emphasize the extent to which this clash results from the location of each group in a global system of structural inequalities. It is not simply a matter of Chinese cultural assumptions allowing for child neglect, while Italian child health professionals’ cultural assumptions value high-quality childcare. On the contrary, high-quality childcare is also valued and practiced by most Chinese parents, grandparents, educators, and child health professionals in China. It is the very contrast between the high-quality childcare that Chinese immigrant parents believe their children need and the necessity of neglecting their children to maintain grueling work schedules that provides much of the motivation for Chinese immigrant parents to send their children back to China, where the grandparents can provide the high-quality childcare that Chinese as well as Italian families and experts consider vital for children’s development. Indeed, my own research has found that many parents who work long hours in China also live separately from their small children, who receive almost all childcare from grandparents (who are usually living in a different part of the same city, for reasons

similar to those espoused by Chinese immigrants in Italy); staying in their country of citizenship has not protected Chinese families from the pressures of global capitalism, although it does protect them from the extremes of legal hassles, travel time, and geographic separation that Chinese immigrants endure abroad.

In addition to presenting a rich and insightful ethnographic study of the perspectives of Chinese immigrants and Italian child health professionals, Krause and Bressan have also developed an innovative approach that they call “encounter ethnography.” As the findings of the Krause and Bressan article demonstrate, this approach is tremendously valuable for understanding the big picture of relationships between immigrants, majority populations, and global systems. Encounters between people with very different perspectives, histories, and cultural assumptions are increasingly important in our increasingly mobile and globalizing world, and much theoretical attention has been paid to the idea of the encounter in anthropological studies, most of which include some rudimentary encounter ethnography in descriptions and analysis of the encounter between the anthropologist and the people he or she is studying. But Krause and Bressan go further, by paying equal attention to both sides of encounters between Italian natives and Chinese immigrants and explaining how and why their histories and cultural assumptions lead to particular kinds of conflicts and cooperation and contribute to the development and maintenance of global systems that bind them together.

As Krause and Bressan point out, most anthropological studies of immigrants tend to focus only on the perspectives and histories of the immigrants and not on the perspectives and histories of the natives encountered by the immigrants. This is often necessary due to practical constraints (because the anthropologist often does not have enough time or funding to build relationships with the immigrants as well as the natives, and because the anthropologist is often much better trained in the language, culture, and history of a particular immigrant group than in the language, culture, and history of the society the immigrant lives in). In addition, studies that pay equal attention to the perspectives of natives and immigrants are also discouraged by what Krause and Bressan call “methodological nationalism,” which often prevails in academic anthropology. Such methodological nationalism encourages the anthropologist to define him/herself as an expert focusing on one particular national/ethnic community, learn the language(s) of that community, and win academic jobs, grants, and publication opportunities reserved for experts focusing on that national and/or ethnic community. Anthropology’s history of focusing on those who are marginalized and/or non-Western also encourages anthropologists to focus mainly on immigrants from non-Western societies rather than on the majority populations of Western societies. This framework is not without value, as it encourages anthropologists to gain deeper understandings of particular national/ethnic communities than researchers in social science disciplines such as psychology and economics, which tend to focus mainly on populations that are large and



accessible enough to yield data for quantitative analysis; assume that in-depth, time-consuming studies of the language, history, and cultural assumptions of a particular national/ethnic group are not necessary for conducting research about members of that group; and devote most of their attention to the study of majority populations in their own countries of residence, which tend to be Western (and anglophone in particular) due to the hegemonic positions those countries enjoy in global academic systems. One of anthropology's greatest contributions has been to develop area studies and ethnic studies and challenge assumptions based on psychologists' and economists' studies of the majority populations of Western societies by showing how those assumptions cannot apply in the same way to non-Westerners who tend to be understudied in Western academia. However, this approach often limits the ability of anthropologists to do encounter ethnography of multiple national/ethnic groups with different languages, histories, and cultural assumptions. One way around that limitation is for an anthropologist to develop expertise in the languages, cultures, and histories of each national/ethnic group in an encounter and spend equal amounts of time developing relationships with each group. However, this will in most cases take at least twice as much time and funding as a study that focuses on just one group, so it is not a feasible option for most anthropologists. Krause, Bressan, and their collaborators show us another more feasible and widely accessible way anthropologists can overcome that limitation: by collaborating and pooling their funding, expertise, time, and perspectives, they managed to develop a study of the big picture of encounters between Chinese immigrants and Italian natives that is much more holistic and insightful than what any one of them could have accomplished with the same amount of time and funding. The richness of their study suggests that anthropologists would do well to engage in more collaborative research and encounter ethnography in other contexts as well.

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This fascinating essay departs from an intriguing demographic fact: that a significant number of the babies born in Prato, Italy, are born to Chinese nationals and will be sent to China for much of their childhood. Elizabeth Krause and Massimo Bressan follow that observation through to their notable conclusions about how the fast fashion industry relies on the ongoing transnationalization of families. That is, your new H&M velour varsity jacket was brought to you by the structural violence of the separation of a flexible worker and his or her child.

Because it is the child who is moving, from Italy to China, the logical literature with which the authors dialogue is that

on child circulation (Lallemand 1993). In that context they examine how children's movements make cultural sense, trace and strengthen existing relationships, and activate transnational citizenship. But from one perspective, the result—a child being raised in a “country of origin” by relatives other than his or her parents—is identical to the result we would see when parents migrate and “leave children behind” (Boehm et al. 2011; Colen 1995; Dreby 2010; Ho 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2005). The empirical material that the authors have assembled could thus provoke scholars of child circulation to rethink “leaving children behind” as, conceptually, a form of child circulation in which children paradoxically do not move. Or, conversely, this material could raise a different theoretical question for the authors: does it matter in what order those demographic events (birth and migration, respectively) occur, for either the outcomes for the child or the theoretical implications for global capitalism and noncapitalist relations?

We also learn a great deal from this essay about the significance of Chinese labor migrants' embeddedness in multigenerational kinship networks. So while the Italian pedagogues and health workers quoted here are focused on the multilayered costs to sent-away children (missed doctor's appointments, lack of stability, failure to “bond”), the Chinese migrants we hear from are not only parents but are also very much adult children. Their felt senses of responsibility and affection thus flow both up and down along their lineal ties, and those bidirectional feelings of attachment are also reinscribed through movements of both economic and human capital: sending remittances to and “giv[ing] some company to the old folks” are both important affirmations of responsibility and reciprocity (Leinaweaver 2013b; Stack and Burton 1993). This observation makes sense in light of the authors' apt use of Mauss and Sahlins to identify “generalized reciprocity.” In the intergenerational context, the circulation of these children to relatives in China is partly already a giving back to the older generation rather than an initial step in a potential reciprocal encounter.

The authors' insights about the ways that capitalism requires the dispersion of families in order to function hint toward the potential to resolve an ongoing tension in the study of something we could call “[kinship + economy].” Marilyn Strathern showed that “kinship and economy popularly tend to be defined as exclusive of each other” (Strathern 1985:193). An exemplar is provided by Engels, who distinguishes between “the production of the means of subsistence” and “the production of human beings themselves” (Engels 1972 [1884]:6). Throughout the essay, as the authors carefully construct the argument that the global capitalism of fast fashion cannot work without the globalization of families, they repeatedly reproduce the very distinction between kinship and capitalism they are also working to overcome (see McKinnon 1999 for an analysis of this process in Evans-Pritchard's work on the Nuer). This is done, for example, in the metaphor of being “sandwiched *between* kin and capitalist regimes” or the strategy of “plac[ing] kinship

processes *in the context of a global economy*" (emphases mine). My sense is that the authors are here approaching something we do not really have adequate words or concepts for. I labeled it [kinship + economy] as an infelicitously phrased placeholder. Another way to put this is: how myriad social practices (including spending time with one's child and obeying a mother's instruction to emigrate; staying in an underground mountaintop cottage in Russia and standing in line to keep one's child registered in Italy; snipping threads off piece after piece for the latest Zara collection and buying a pink iPhone case and Disney ringtone) all together are the object of analysis rather than tokens of separate spheres we might label "kinship," "migration," and "capitalism," respectively.

Finally, I turn to the not inconsiderable implications for social justice of the authors' scholarship. Having read this piece with an uncomfortable awareness of my own complicity in the global economic processes that create the social phenomena they describe, I was left wondering what concrete actions they hope might follow from their work. The authors' respectful recognition of the ways that Chinese migrants value the ability to send their children to China, amid structural constraints that preclude other options, suggests that a simple exhortation not to purchase fast fashion severely misreads their work. Instead, they invoke public anthropology and action research aspects of their collaborative project, the goals of which appear to incorporate European approaches to "integration" of immigrants (Leinaweaver 2013a:22). Do those policy goals reflect or contrast with the perspectives of both the labor migrants and their distant family members in China? And more generally, how would the authors suggest that readers productively respond to the injustices documented in this article?

In sum, Krause and Bressan have produced a provocative and important assessment of what it "means" when children are sent to China. And it clearly "means" on many fronts—fast fashion relies on this possibility, Chinese workers see this outcome as unavoidable but in some ways sincerely positive, and Italian social service workers pathologize that relocation within an overly narrow frame where it is merely the parent's "choice." These children—from whom we do not hear directly—are nonetheless present here, as indices, as canaries in the capitalist coal mine, because their physical locations on the globe speak volumes about other global processes.

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Krause and Bressan spotlight a particular factor that has increased the circulation of children and minors in globalization space and time. Family separation in the migratory context is often analyzed, but the particularity here is that once weaned, children born in the destination country are immediately re-

turned to their parents' country of origin, China, while the parents continue to live and work in Italy. Italian journalistic and social and educational services are aware of this Chinese family practice and the "locality analysis" developed here perfectly shows how it is contested in "expert discourses" with child welfare psychologists and consultants, who see it only as detrimental to the child's psychological health. This corresponds to the general local opinion of the Chinese, which sees Chinese mothers as unloving and neglectful of their children. Amy Chua's book (2011), which favored a strict upbringing for children, caught the Italian press's eye and was reported as proof that Chinese "tiger mothers" are somewhat inhuman. Obviously, Chinese mothers in Prato also believe that their upbringing methods produce "brighter children," and Krause and Bressan sustain that they see child circulation as a value. The authors convincingly shift attention from the psycho-educational individualism with which the practice is locally criticized to the pictures that immigrant Chinese families have built to justify their presence in global capitalism geography. In striving to keep the household together during transcontinental dispersion with a view to future economic success, dispersion itself is used as a resource. Child circulation exploits this resource by reinforcing household cohesion. Krause and Bressan evoke the gift/market dichotomy: while Chinese families engage in aggressive capitalism to gain supremacy in fast fashion, with a considerable increase in working hours, they also rely on the generalized reciprocity that reigns within the global household where grandparents and relatives in China look after the children of hyperbusy parents working in Italy. I wonder whether this interpretation, which rightly introduces the role of kinship in globalized capitalism analysis, does, however, need further development.

According to an Italian Ministry of Labor and Social Policies (2016) report on January 1, 2016, although the number of Chinese immigrants legally living in Italy held fourth place (5.4% of the total behind Romanians, Albanians, and Moroccans), China was the main destination for remittances from Italy, with 13.4% of the total (€557 million). Might we ask ourselves whether part of these remittances goes toward the costs of children being raised by grandparents? The report also indicates a balanced family-type migration (women 49.4%, men 50.6%), but compared to other foreign migrants, a high percentage of Chinese women own individual businesses (46%, top place among foreigners in terms of businesswomen). This figure coincides with the high number of bank accounts held by Chinese women (32% of the total). The fact that Chinese businessmen and businesswomen attract labor mainly from China, although highly channeled toward niche economies, favors both regular and irregular immigration. This leads to at least three types of Chinese immigrant: businessmen/businesswomen with regular residence permits, workers with regular residence permits, and workers with no residence permits. Those with no permits hope to soon become regular and businessmen themselves (either in fashion or catering). So is Krause and Bressan's analysis valid for all of these figures? A fair question when one

thinks of the practice, which the authors do not mention, of temporary shared parentage, experienced more as shared maternity. This phenomenon was studied among the Chinese living in the province of Naples (Musilli 2010): illegal immigrants who cannot access child welfare services (nursery or playschool) or go to China, due to the expense or their illegal status, who entrust their Italy-born children to Neapolitan wives. This widespread type of fostering is obviously illegal. Months-old children are handed over, even for wet nursing, and raised with the Neapolitan families' other children for up to 2 years or more. The Chinese family pays a monthly fee (€400–€600), and the Neapolitan family pays for the child's needs, food, and health care. The child lives entirely with the Neapolitan family, learning to speak Neapolitan and Italian, with regular or occasional visits from the parents. Normally, when the Chinese family manages to legalize its position, and not wanting the child to become "too Italian," he or she is reclaimed and taken to grandparents in China where he or she receives a second, particularly linguistic enculturation. The sums previously given to the Neapolitan family are then redirected to the Chinese relatives. When the children return to Italy, they are rarely reentrusted to the same Neapolitan family. In this context, Chinese children speak of their "Chinese mum" and "Italian mum." These families living on the Vesuvian foothills mainly come from Wenzhou (Zhejiang), the same city as many Chinese entrepreneurs and workers in Prato where this practice of entrusting children to Italian mothers also seems not to be unfamiliar. In an interview in 2007 (Reali 2007), the Prato Municipality Multiethnicity Councilor explained that women who give their children to a "wet nurse" were either workers without permits or successful businesswomen, but while the former entrusted their children to Italian families, the latter hosted the Italian mother in their homes. The workers did so because a trip to China was too expensive; the businesswomen did so because they could afford to keep children and "Italian mum" at home. These facts would seem to complicate Krause and Bressan's excellent analysis since they indicate that class differences can turn child circulation in several directions and involve not only Chinese but also Italian families. From this point of view, a "locality analysis" is indispensable.

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The kernel of truth for this paper lies in what Krause and Bressan call an "encounter with experts," in which a psychologist in Prato advised mostly women teachers and health care workers on problems confronting Chinese immigrants in Italy. The psychologist, Bertolino, hails from the Franz Fanon Center and quotes from Fanon, conjuring up the very picture of a woke psychologist. Bertolino describes the ways that the Chinese immigrant is sometimes violently but consistently positioned

as the "other." As readers, we nod our heads in agreement. And then he goes on to speak of a practice he calls "dangerous," which is when Chinese immigrants in Italy send their children back to China to be raised by family members. This assessment seems to be confirmed by the opening vignette of a Chinese immigrant family in a pediatrician's office, where a doctor struggles to negotiate a later return for an infant in the middle of a treatment related to his premature birth. But this is the entire project of Krause and Bressan, to pull these two moments together and pull them apart again. What they do is significant, and difficult—to take a practice like transnational parenting and place it in the terms of the everyday survival practices of immigrant families that others have come to too easy an agreement to condemn.

Krause's fieldwork with Chinese immigrant families reveals the double bind of low-wage documented and undocumented immigrants, the one we thought that Bertolino could, but doesn't, see. These immigrants live in societies in which their labor is indispensable, and yet their lives, their household lives and practices, are not only dispensable but actively made difficult. Fashion factories disallow children to stay in the barracks of workers, or have flexible work regimes that require childcare at midnight, or simply require work shifts that make it difficult to participate in children's lives. Peng, a second-generation Chinese immigrant who had experienced this practice himself as a child, explains that he came to send his own son because he didn't want to raise him "like a cat" living in a box in the corner. Other parents confirm the difficulty they have in managing children under exacting and exploitative work conditions and explain how, despite the distress that distance causes them, they have made the best choice they could for their children. Sometimes parents reason that these children they have sent away are receiving care by loving kin rather than questionable care and poor living conditions in the country of destination. Krause and Bressan identify the blind spot of Bertolino the psychologist: that children migrating back and forth in global households can also be "loved, nurtured, and enlivened through transnational networks."

The ethnographic work here is grounded and careful, and Krause and Bressan have a clear commitment to give voice to those parents who were shouted down in the encounter with experts as "bad" parents. Consider, though, a particular case they describe, that of Giorgio, a first-grader whose childcare is marked by the double bind of low-wage immigrant workers. After spending years in China under the care of extended family, he returns to parents and requires treatment with a local psychologist. We learn that he plays a haunting game as he awaits his parents who sometimes arrive late to pick him up from school. The child psychologist also reported that Giorgio once put a noose around his neck and said "I want to die," and on another occasion he hurt himself badly at school and had to be taken to the hospital but declared it the best day of his life because of the attention he received. The boy suffers from separation anxiety, and the psychologist struggles with his parents as they say they are unable to spend more time with him.

Krause and Bressan argue that the encounter reveals the “incommensurability in terms of parenting” between a psychologist who cannot extend beyond Italian or Western models of parenting and the global household’s survival strategies. In this very case, Krause and Bressan suggest that global households “have embraced” this condition. But this is perhaps where we can resist the idea of easy choice, the very critique they have of Bertolino. There is a profound difference between survival strategies and “free choice,” however problematic such a notion. If we were to ask Giorgio’s parents, they may well wish they could do things otherwise and avoid a condition of separation anxiety for their child. If we were to ask Giorgio himself, he may have a strong desire to feel less “lost” than he does. Their work doesn’t show that these households have intentionally sought out or embraced these arrangements as an absolute best. Parents in fact report parental distress, longing for and missing first moments of children’s lives. What their work demonstrates is that parents are doing what they believe to be relatively better for their children under conditions of economic precarity.

The answer to Bertolino who too simply categorizes practices as “dangerous” does not lie in saying that transnational childcare is without problem or to recast complex cases as ones characterized by migrant agency. Perhaps the answer instead lies in saying global household practices (including the undervalued and unrecognized ones such as childcare) are characterized fully by contradictions, by parents who love and do the best they can under impossible economic conditions, and whose children sometimes feel that love and sometimes suffer because of those impossible conditions. This is in fact what we see so clearly from Krause and Bressan’s work, and this is in itself a valuable insight. Certainly, it is a different response to moralistic assessments of migrant households (particularly undocumented ones that are often pathologized for putting their children at risk in some ways), and that fight is so very urgent around the world that this work comes in right at the moment we need it the most.

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## Reply

The comments from these seven scholars constitute a gift. Taken as a whole, their criticism and praise provide insight and offer richly textured provocations for research related to a world that, while ever malleable, is also ever stubborn. In the comments that follow, we embrace a spirit of reciprocity as we address methodological inquiries, propose an agenda for directions in future research, and conclude with ethical implications for social justice.

### Encounter Ethnography

We developed encounter ethnography as a methodological strategy for transnational collaboration. Baldassar commends

the paper for juxtaposing and comparing perspectives related to the circulation of children. We were moved that Safri identifies a “kernel of truth” emerging from encounters. Fong praises encounter ethnography for the way in which it offers a lens on the clashes between citizen experts and migrant parents, and she calls it “tremendously valuable for understanding the big picture of relationships between immigrants, majority populations, and global systems.” As such, she underscores an expanded view that we were hoping to offer through a subtle shift in ethnographic practice and perspective. In addition, Fong stresses her appreciation of the attention we paid to “both sides of encounters,” our grappling with explanations of how histories and assumptions lead to conflicts and cooperation. We were especially struck by her phrasing that together these “contribute to the development and maintenance of global systems that bind them together.”

Those bindings are often rendered invisible through urban segregation patterns, heightened security, and xenophobic discourses. In this sense, we see encounter ethnography as a methodological positioning that works and writes against the sort of divisions and separatist backlash coursing through many societies the world over.

Another key characteristic of encounter ethnography is that it offers a counter to “methodological nationalism” (after Glick Schiller) through ceasing to focus exclusively on immigrant communities but instead looking at the relations between and across so-called communities. We aim to break down assumptions that communities are bounded. We want to draw attention to the ways that their constitution is ever in flux. Among Chinese in Prato, class divisions emerge and manifest powerfully in consumption practices and residence patterns, with newcomers settling into housing in a stigmatized neighborhood (only recently assuming the familiar moniker of Chinatown) whereas the newly monied class transfer to apartments in more prestigious neighborhoods on the periphery or villas in the hilltowns. We take inspiration from Eric Wolf’s well-trodden billiard ball critique of the culture concept, Anna Tsing’s call for the arts of noticing, and Ernesto De Martino’s insights related to analytic categories and observational paradoxes.

In characterizing the paper and approach as “worthy to serve as a model for other work on global families,” Feldman-Savelsberg also asked for some clarification. Is encounter ethnography a way of conducting research or an approach to enriching analysis? The quick answer is, both. To clarify, the clashes were largely possible not because of juxtapositions that we created but rather because of our commitment to socially occurring encounters that we observed, listened to, or reconstructed. We hope our responses honor her request as we extend the analysis.

Fieldwork generates certain kinds of knowledge. For the anthropologist who desires to linger in the details, to revere the gods of small things, in hopes of ultimately grasping the proverbial world in a grain of sand, the problem becomes one of reducing lots of tidbits of information to graspable categories. We need categories for sensemaking. Yet categories also have



origins. They set limits on our interpretations. The possibilities for distortion are endless.

De Martino grappled with precisely this paradox as he struggled to engage with poor Southern Italians in the 1940s–1960s, when he encountered ways of thinking, acting, healing, and practicing religion that seemed strange to educated city folk. His work represented an ongoing dialogue with the anti-fascist Antonio Gramsci, and he was drawn to illuminate how subaltern practices occurred in relation to hegemonic systems. De Martino coined the phrase “ethnographic encounters” to sketch an epistemology of ethnographic practice. At the heart of the practice of doing ethnography was a problem deeply rooted in more than 2,000 years of Western thought: the whole of the West manifested itself in ethnographic categories. Ultimately, ethnographic encounters themselves were shot through with unresolvable contradictions. “The paradox, then,” De Martino continued, “is this: either do not use our categories of observation, and then nothing can be observed, or use them, and then we will see only a projection of ourselves in the other, never the other” (De Martino 1977:409–410; authors’ translation).

For De Martino, the path to minimizing the negative effects of the paradox involves becoming aware of the limitations of the categories of observation and the heightening of one’s consciousness with regard to inbuilt ethnocentrism. We need to be open to recognizing where our categories fail. This calls for keen and critical attention to the lens of observation as well as permission to allow the “alien” sense of things to linger. It may also illuminate configurations of power, who and what dominate, how these relationships play out, and why it matters. Encounters themselves can serve to freeze frames of social life.

This orientation enlivens encounter ethnography. To be clear, we propose encounter ethnography as a way to frame research, to carry it out, to analyze it, and to write it up. These are conceptually different phases in any given ethnographic project yet all deeply related.

## Future Research

Taken as a whole, the commentators raise issues that add up to a lifetime of research. While this can feel daunting, we find it productive to think with, especially in terms of setting an agenda for the future.

A number of the commentators acknowledge the value of collaboration. Fong in particular underscores the ways in which anthropologists are often limited in working among multiple national/ethnic groups due to differences of language, histories, and cultural assumptions. She applauds collaboration—acknowledging the ways that funding, expertise, time, and perspectives were extended and lent themselves to illuminating a “big picture” in which the whole was larger, more holistic, and more insightful than the individual parts. We welcome her recognition of the value of collaboration.

A team-based approach meant that, as anthropologists, we had to let go of our fetish of the lone researcher. This meant

dispersing our relationships with participants across team members. As a US anthropologist, coming and going can feel like living through social death. Reminders were frequent, however, that everyone’s relationships and social circles change in continuation.

Criticism for the most part focuses on absences. No project can do it all. Baldassar notes that the perspectives of the children themselves were missing and laments the lack of a transnationalism from below. Similarly, Butt suggests a silence around children’s voices. Butt raises an acute challenge in terms of studying what the infant would say “were he or she asked.” This line of inquiry might seem far-fetched, but as Butt rightly points out, infant bodies convey “skinship”—the intense and messy work of caring for humans in what is arguably the most vulnerable phase in the life course. Most definitely, global capitalism disrupts skinship and reshapes whose skins are in contact with whose and certainly allows for new and joint enactments of the mutuality of being that Sahlin’s has reminded is so central to kinship.

We agree that much could be learned from an intensive focus that follows kin via skin. And children certainly can bring valuable perspectives. Such a lens would also allow insight into the particulars and variations of distributed parenting, namely, how emotions and exchanges stretch across time and space; however, framing our project with children at its center was beyond its scope. In our research design, we decided against including another “vulnerable subject” category. Many of our adult participants were already categorically vulnerable due to their economic precarity and undocumented resident status. Adding very young children seemed that it would be ethically challenging given an already complex research design, not to mention social context. We specifically sought consensual participation only from individuals who were at least 18 years old. It is certainly possible for Institutional Review Boards to approve research that focuses on minors, and there is a body of emerging scholarship among children migrants (Ni Laoire et al. 2012; Tyrrell et al. 2013). The impact of parental migration on children’s health is complex. In China, left-behind children reportedly account for one-fifth of children, and parents’ struggles over decisions to bring their children with them to cities or to leave them behind suggests a range of scenarios in terms of what is best for children (Huang et al. 2018).

In the future, research on transnational families and their networks and practices might draw inspiration from sensibilities informing multispecies ethnography so as to decenter adult perspectives in a similar way that some migration scholars have decentered human agency, for example, to reveal how security policies exploit the agency of specific environments to the detriment of certain devalued classes of human beings (De León 2015).

As is true with so much ethnographically produced knowledge, context and specificity matter. Piasere wonders about the extent of the research’s validity given the different types of Chinese migrants: entrepreneurs with residence permits, workers with residence permits, and those without residence per-

mits. We should clarify that our sample of more than 40 Chinese parents included all of these categories. We found a great deal of fluidity as well; some couples had mixed-residence status, which made life complicated. Many of our research participants had arrived in Italy as undocumented migrants and later secured legal status. For example, one individual who defined himself as Prato's most historic Chinese entrepreneur arrived via France as an undocumented migrant and eventually secured full and legal residence status.

Stories and scenarios are many. We are grateful that Piasere raises the case of Naples where Chinese from Wenzhou entrust their children to Neapolitan women for full-time care—a type of widespread fostering that he describes as “obviously illegal.” The phrase “obviously illegal” struck a chord because of the history of wet nursing in Tuscany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Related memories are mostly forgotten because they are so painful and counter to the common sense of Italian mothering and attachment parenting today. The story of Enza, who served as a rural wet nurse to a baby from Hospital of the Innocents, Brunelleschi's famous foundling home in Florence, for 5 years, until the day the police came to retrieve the little boy, by which point his caretaker had formed such a deep relationship with the child that it was like her own son being ripped from her. Her daughter recalled her late mother saying, “No, even if I starve to death, I'm not doing these things anymore” (Krause 2009:214).

Anthropologists are much more skilled at identifying practices and pulling apart their meanings than drawing legal lines in the sand. Having said that, we are aware of cases of Italians fostering Chinese children in Prato. Still, it would be interesting to learn more about why such fostering appears much more widespread in Naples than in Prato, but it may very well come down to the fact that Prato has been the site of a major national security campaign, and such “illegal” methods of extending kin through care networks, on the local level, are just too risky.

Regarding kinship and economy, we aim to show analytically how regimes articulate and how they are relational. This brings to mind Jessaca Leinaweaver's description of two caretaking practices as “identical”: circulating children and leaving children behind. Her provocation is good to think with and leads us to see commonalities. In both cases, the parents and children are separated, and in both cases, the parents are often criticized for abandoning their children; however, we also call for caution in asserting sameness. If we see these practices as identical, we miss a major point of what is happening on the ground in the society where the immigrants have settled, either temporarily or indefinitely. The encounter ethnography reveals that specific discursive formations arise from circulating children back from a place where they were born. The parents who are living in Italy and then sending their children back to China are active participants in generating a new world. Their actions lead others—all of those Italian experts, for example—to comment, and these commentaries collect into discursive formations that in turn become part of new dynamics.

## Ethical Implications

New dynamics have serious ethical implications. We are grateful for the frankness with which Leinaweaver raises questions about social justice and expresses her discomfort with her “own complicity in the global economic processes that create the social phenomena” we describe. She wonders about the “concrete actions” we hope might follow from our work.

Leinaweaver's comment fully represents what we would expect our article to provoke in the reader's mind: a critical vision of global restructuring of production and consumption processes, particularly with regard to the local society where these processes take place and where they deeply involve social groups. Although it is impossible to guarantee the conditions under which our clothes were made, due to global supply chains and layers of subcontracting, we can inform ourselves about labor conditions (Clean Clothes Campaign 2014; Giannini 2014; Max 2018). Our intention was not only that of stimulating change in the individual behaviors of our readers but also that of involving the residents of the neighborhoods where we worked in applied research projects.

During our research, we participated in numerous public initiatives and promoted a participatory planning pathway in the neighborhood of San Paolo, involving groups of residents in the discussion of changes that have characterized the city. We supported and sustained an approach to valorize and defend green and rural spaces that have remained trapped, like dystopic cul-de-sacs, in the factories and condominiums built during the years of industrial and real estate growth. This form of public anthropology is particularly important in those contexts where public debate fosters racist rhetoric, including in covert forms that are unwittingly guilty and even become considered plausible explanations for cultural differences.

Our concrete actions were designed to combat a xenophobic war of position against the Chinese as well as to counter urban segregation. One of our intellectual interventions illuminates how Prato in the 1970s, long before the arrival of the Chinese, was referred to as “Italian Hong Kong” for its conditions that became infamous for self-exploitation; Italian subcontractors working in that era recalled, “we are the Chinese,” to describe their flexible labor in relation to other Europeans (Krause 2018: 123; Krause and Bressan 2017). We draw parallels between these two worlds to highlight a better understanding of the complexity of processes of economic and social change and of their impact on the quotidian lives of people and families as well as on the dynamics of urban transformation: issues that are often marginal in public debate as well as local political rhetoric and that we have caused to emerge starting with stories of residents.

This discussion brings to mind a different sort of kinship, that between anthropologist and humanitarian. Miriam Ticktin reminds us that anthropological studies on humanitarianism began to take shape as a moral and political project concerned with universal suffering, initially, in the 1980s, connected with international refugees and displacement (Ticktin 2014). From a critical lens, Ticktin argues that through this new kinship, the

worn-out anthropological “savage slot” was reworked as the “suffering slot.” The focus on suffering and humanity, she writes, “paved the way for a new type of intellectual-moral engagement” (2014:277). One strand of scholarship embraced humanitarian intervention whereas another critiqued intervention and the unintended consequences of the related regimes and industries of care. Prato’s Chinese immigrants, whose stories range from indebted workers to wealthy entrepreneurs, do not comfortably fit into the so-called suffering slot.

As forms of humanitarianism move well beyond emergency relief, they blur boundaries between public aid, private philanthropy, religious charity, and even the security state. An example of such blurring occurred in the public response to the deadly Teresa Moda factory fire in December 2013 in Prato that killed seven Chinese workers. Politicians from across the political spectrum were quick to frame their interventions as humanitarian while also ramping up state-sanctioned security tactics. We were suspicious of this facile claim to humanitarian intervention, especially by certain politicians, such as the former mayor, who had run his political campaign on an anti-immigrant platform and proceeded to engage in militaristic-style raids on Chinese immigrant firm owners and workers. We published an op-ed in *Truthout* to challenge discourses that criminalize immigrants (Krause and Bressan 2014). All told, we aimed to circumnavigate a “cul-de-sac of critique” (Ticktin 2014:283).

As the late Italian anthropologist Amalia Signorelli reminds us, there exists a tight relationship between the variety of cultural forms and social stratification. Cultural differences, “in addition to geographical distance and historical separation, are also produced in relation to class differences” (Signorelli 2015: 97; authors’ translation). This quote brings to mind current political debates related to citizenship and immigration that center on the opposition between whether one is born Italian or whether one becomes Italian (*italiani si nasce/italiani si diventa*). In that light, we might extend Signorelli’s comment on cultural differences: a person is not simply born Chinese but actually becomes Chinese; alternatively, a person might have been Chinese at a time when they aspired to become something else.

—Elizabeth L. Krause and Massimo Bressan

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