

In the Absence of Men? Gender, Migration and Domestic Labour in the Southern Ecuadorean Andes

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Abstract. Female heads of households in the migrant-exporting community of Jima, Ecuador, are using remittances to employ domestic workers. As both workers and ‘mistresses’ originate from the same *mestizo* peasant class, these new labour relations do not reflect embedded class inequalities, but are rather emerging as a new mode of distinction between newly prosperous households and those for whom migration has been a less successful strategy. This lends a temporal fragility and fluidity to household relations, as worker and employer seek to define their roles and establish hierarchies. Employers negotiate these tensions not only to reduce their own burden of labour, but also because domestic workers are a symbol of social mobility and help enhance the reputation of migrant men. Thus, while men are physically absent, they continue to inform the reorganisation of the Jimeño household, and there is little to suggest that gender roles are being realigned in a structurally significant manner.

Keywords: domestic labour, remittances, migration, leisure, gender relations, household hierarchies, care chains, Ecuador

Introduction

This paper asks how the female kin of transnational migrants are restructuring the household in the semi-permanent absence of men, and examines the intersection between gender, migration, remittance prosperity and labour. Ethnographically situated in the rural community of Jima, located in the

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El Austro region of the southern Ecuadorean highlands, I approach this question through the lens of domestic labour relations, and explore the new care relations being created as a result of increased, remittance-based, prosperity. Specifically, I look to demonstrate that the newly prosperous wives of migrants utilise remittance income to reduce their own burden of care labour by employing both live-in and casual domestic workers, and that, through these changing practices, they constitute themselves as both members of the leisure class and as household managers. I explore the subtle, and often contradictory, manner in which female heads of households manage their relations with their workers, highlighting how they seek to bring the latter close by incorporating them into the home while also creating boundaries of distinction.¹ I am not, however, suggesting that the female kin of successful migrants are ceasing to labour entirely; rather, I contend, some use the opportunities that male migration presents to engage with new fields of labour, including the direction of household and construction affairs.

My choice of the term 'head of household' is intentional. As will become evident throughout the course of this paper, the wives of successful migrants operate with relative independence in relation to both the tactical decision-making and the quotidian running of their household unit. Yet they are also dependent on the continuing labour and economic contributions of physically absent migrants, and significant decisions, particularly regarding the construction of the home in Jima, are jointly made. Thus the boundaries of the household, which has long been acknowledged as an economic, productive unit and a site of reproduction within Andean peasant communities, are being stretched and redefined to incorporate non-resident kin.² However, as the direction of remittances indicates, the household in Jima – which is commonly female-headed and also comprises children and waged workers – remains the hub that migrants support financially. This conceptualisation, I suggest, reflects both the independence and interdependence of the transnational household and its actors, and it enables the analysis of the Jimeño household on its own terms, while also accounting for continuing relations with migrants living in the United States. Moreover, as distinct yet complementary gender roles have been a defining characteristic of household labour in the Andes, I look to highlight complementarities at a transnational

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (New York: Routledge, 1984).

² David Kyle, *Transnational Peasants: Migrations, Networks and Ethnicity in Andean Ecuador* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Carmen Diana Deere, *Household and Class Relations: Peasants and Landlords in Northern Peru* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990).

level while exploring how the physical absence of men is opening (and closing) new labour opportunities for women at a local level.³

This paper is based on a total of 18 months of fieldwork in the El Austro region. From November 2005 to November 2006 I resided permanently in Jima, living within a *mestizo* peasant household that was economically reliant on remittances and was typical – in terms of income levels, the migration of male kin and domestic labour practices – of others in the community. The female head of this household and her domestic workers were key participants in my research, as were members of her extended kin network. Additional participants were recruited from outside ‘my’ household’s network through everyday interactions in the community, and although I did not reside within these households, I attempted to spend a proportion of my day with them and attended a number of private family fiestas. This proximity facilitated my close observation of everyday domestic relations and practices in a number of households, and I spent the majority of my time in the intimate spaces of the kitchen, dining room and salon, observing, working alongside and conversing with both employers and workers. Participant observation was supported by interviews and group discussions with workers and their employers, and I commonly interviewed casual workers outside of their working environment during visits to their homes. Further visits to Jima and follow-up interviews took place during a period of additional fieldwork in El Austro from January to June 2010.

Regional and Theoretical Context

The El Austro region has long been acknowledged as ‘the locus of massive, predominantly male migration to the United States and Spain and the inflow of remittances that serve to transform the livelihood of the poor’, and the village of Jima is, in many ways, typical of this process.⁴ Migration from Jima is predominantly, although not exclusively, a male practice, and nearly all the husbands, brothers and elder sons of my research participants – who were all drawn from the *mestizo* peasant class – are currently living in the United States and commonly sending home remittances that average between US\$ 200 and US\$ 350 per month.⁵ Many of these migrants have resided in

³ Olivia Harris, *To Make the Earth Bear Fruit: Ethnographic Essays on Fertility, Work and Gender in Highland Bolivia* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2000).

⁴ Norman E. Whitten, ‘Introduction’, in Whitten (ed.), *Millennial Ecuador: Critical Essays on Cultural Transformation and Social Dynamics* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2003), p. 10.

⁵ Remittance income is dependent on the number of migrant kin living in the United States, and the highest ‘earners’ commonly receive income from their husbands and older children. While average remittance income clusters around US\$ 350, some households receive closer to US\$ 500, while others receive sporadic payments of US\$ 50–100. Pribilsky notes similar

the United States for the past ten to 15 years and, more recently, have been joined by the second, and occasionally third, generation. Migration from Ecuador to the United States was reported as early as the 1930s and, in its embryonic stages, was dominated by those originating from the El Austro provinces of Azuay and Cañar.⁶ The rate started to rise steadily in the 1960s, fuelled primarily by the decline of the Panama hat industry, and continued slowly and persistently throughout the 1970s, with migrants using trade connections and networks to migrate to New York, Los Angeles and Chicago.⁷ The first of two major migratory waves did not occur until the early 1980s, however, and was instigated by the sharp decline in the national economy following the collapse of oil prices. The subsequent rise in inflation and decrease in wages was keenly felt in rural El Austro, and men from the region 'formed the "core" sending zone of Ecuadorean migration' at this time.⁸ The second wave, which commenced in the late 1990s, was again triggered by economic crisis but was much wider in terms of gender, age, professional background, home region and destination country than the previous wave, although migration from El Austro remained, as it does today, male-dominated and centred towards the United States.⁹

Long-term male migration to the United States continues, as with other communities in El Austro, to be the primary economic strategy of Jimeño households.¹⁰ Despite its long history, and the gradual associated shift away from small-scale agriculture, my research participants explained that it is only within the last decade that the economic benefits of migration have been felt, and the community is locally perceived as being in a state of rapid social change. The recent increased levels of remittance-based prosperity, coupled with sustained outward orientation, have wrought significant changes on the material and social landscape, as remittances are converted into expansive urban-style villas and domestic appliances, agricultural land is bulldozed to

clustering around US\$ 250, with significant numbers of households receiving US\$ 250–500. Jason Pribilsky, *La Chulla Vida: Gender, Migration and the Family in Andean Ecuador and New York City* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p. 75.

⁶ US Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2005* (Washington, DC, 2006).

⁷ Brad Jokisch and Jason Pribilsky, 'The Panic to Leave: Economic Crisis and the "New Emigration" from Ecuador', *International Migration*, 40: 4 (2002), pp. 75–101; Kyle, *Transnational Peasants*.⁸ Jokisch and Pribilsky, 'The Panic to Leave', p. 78.

⁹ Ann Miles, *From Cuenca to Queens: A Story of Transnational Migration* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004); Jokisch and Pribilsky, 'The Panic to Leave'; Kyle, *Transnational Peasants*; Pribilsky, *La Chulla Vida*; Mary Weismantel, 'Mothers of the Patria: La Chola Cuencana and La Mama Negra', in Whitten (ed.), *Millennial Ecuador*, pp. 325–54.

¹⁰ See Miles, *From Cuenca to Queens*; Jokisch and Pribilsky, 'The Panic to Leave'; Kyle, *Transnational Peasants*; and Pribilsky, *La Chulla Vida*.

make way for car parks and ornamental gardens, and those who remain at home become increasingly reliant on remittances. Jimeños are conspicuous consumers and, as has also been noted by those working in neighbouring communities, extensive homes, and their contents, have become symbols of migratory success and social mobility in the region.¹¹

The shift in economic strategy thereby unfolds at the level of the household, as it becomes 'a site of consumption and speculative investment rather than economic production'.¹² A myriad of new and changing labour relations is emerging, with the female kin of successful migrants using their new prosperity to lead lives of increasing leisure, introduce domestic workers into the home, and participate in construction affairs. This mistress–servant dynamic constitutes a new relation for many Jimeñas, and the first time they are managing waged relations with other women from their own social class. This presents an ethnographic opportunity to explore the production of difference from a position of structural similarity, and move away from an analysis of domestic labour based on embedded structural inequalities.¹³ Consequently, I highlight the fragility and fluidity of household relations, and the ambiguous social position of domestic workers.¹⁴ My focus on domestic labour can further facilitate a nuanced understanding of shifting gender relations in the context of male migration, and I address a question raised by Parreñas regarding the extent to which the organisation of transnational households can result in the 'reconstitution of gender relations'.¹⁵ Based in the Philippines, her research highlights that although migration has the potential to reconfigure structural gender relations, the reality is somewhat different, and she introduces the concept of the 'gender paradox' by concluding that migration and absent parenting results in the intensification and entrenchment of the gender division of labour. This argument appears initially contrary to Andean ethnographic accounts that suggest that the female kin of migrants enjoy increasing autonomy and new social roles in the absence of men.¹⁶ One of my concerns in this paper is therefore to reconcile these two positions by

¹¹ Kyle, *Transnational Peasants*; Miles, *From Cuenca to Queens*; Pribilsky, *La Chulla Vida*.

¹² Kyle, *Transnational Peasants*, p. 104.

¹³ See Kathinka Frøystad, 'Master–Servant Relations and the Domestic Reproduction of Caste in Northern India', *Ethnos*, 68: 1 (2003), pp. 73–94; Anna Rubbo and Michael Taussig, 'Up off Their Knees: Servanthood in Southwest Colombia', *Latin American Perspectives*, 10: 4 (1983), pp. 5–23; Grace E. Young, 'The Myth of Being "Like a Daughter"', *Latin American Perspectives*, 14: 3 (1987), pp. 365–80.

¹⁴ Lesley Gill, 'Painted Faces: Conflict and Ambiguity in Domestic Servant–Employer Relations in La Paz 1930–1988', *Latin American Research Review*, 25: 1 (1990), pp. 119–36; Karen Tranberg Hansen, 'Domestic Trials: Power and Autonomy in Domestic Service in Zambia', *American Ethnologist*, 17: 2 (1990), pp. 360–75.

¹⁵ See Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 163.

¹⁶ Deere, *Household and Class Relations*; Pribilsky, *La Chulla Vida*.

demonstrating how the heads of households, while increasingly independent on a quotidian basis, remain embedded in the reproductive sphere. I thus look to further illuminate how the intersection between gender, migration, income and labour unfolds in the everyday lives of the women who remain 'at home'.

Despite the significant body of literature that explores transnational networks and kinship, gender relations, and economic change in El Austro, the transformation of reproductive labour, while indicated, has not yet been the focus of anthropological analysis, and domestic care relations have received scant attention.¹⁷ Consequently, the impact of remittances at a household level in the region remains largely under-analysed, and although both Kyle and Pribilsky have noted a shift in household orientation from production to consumption, the household relations that support this shift have not been the focus of investigation.¹⁸ The organisation of domestic labour has, however, received considerable attention from scholars working in other migratory contexts, and there is also an emerging literature on global care chains.¹⁹ Yet, the dominant subject in both these related fields of scholarship is the experience of migrant domestic workers, originating from the global South, in the global North, and analysis has generally been framed in relation to structural class, racial and ethnic differences – an approach exemplified by Glenn, who argues that white, privileged women in the United States maintain a 'racial division of reproductive labour' through their employment practices.²⁰ Similarly, Anderson states that waged domestic labour relations are inherently racialised.²¹ This approach is also found in work situated within Latin America, with Gill's and Bunster and Chaney's accounts of rural-to-urban migration in La Paz and Lima respectively both highlighting the ethnic inequalities between white, urban employers and indigenous, rural workers.²² Parreñas adopts a similar position, and the prevalence of structure is

¹⁷ See Miles, *From Cuenca to Queens*; Kyle, *Transnational Peasants*; and Pribilsky, *La Chulla Vida*.
¹⁸ Kyle, *Transnational Peasants*; Pribilsky, *La Chulla Vida*.

¹⁹ See Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration*; Amaia Pérez Orozco, *Global Perspectives on the Social Organization of Care in Times of Crisis: Assessing the Situation*, Gender, Migration and Development Series, Working Paper no. 5 (Santo Domingo: UN-INSTRAW, 2009).

²⁰ Evelyn Nakano Glenn, 'From Servitude to Service Work: The Historical Continuities of Women's Paid and Unpaid Reproductive Labour', *Signs*, 18: 1 (1992), pp. 1–44.

²¹ Bridget Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work: The Global Politics of Domestic Labour* (London: Zed Books, 2000). See also Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Denise Segura and Patricia Zavella (eds.), *Women and Migration in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands: A Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); and Lynn Stephen, *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California and Oregon* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

²² Lesley Gill, *Precarious Dependencies: Gender, Class and Domestic Service in Bolivia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 89; Ximena Bunster and Elsa M. Chaney, *Sellers and Servants: Working Women in Lima, Peru* (Granby, MA: Greenwood Press, 1989).

epitomised in her definition of global care chains as a 'three-tier transfer of care among women in poor and rich nations'. These chains are created as women migrate from the global South to 'alleviate the care burdens of privileged women in the global North', leaving the care of their own children, in turn, to women of 'lesser privilege'.²³

This body of scholarship demonstrates that while the burden of domestic labour continues to fall on women, it is not experienced uniformly.²⁴ The literature also draws attention to the ways in which globalised changes in the organisation of productive labour are resulting in a market for, and reorganisation of, reproductive labour.²⁵ However, this relation is represented as one that is rather causal and driven by functional need, with the femininisation of the productive labour force and attempts by women to avoid working a 'double day' being cited among the factors informing the reorganisation of the household.²⁶ As Parreñas concludes, 'many overwhelmed working women ... have had few choices but to rely on the commodification and consequent devaluation of care work'.²⁷

The consistent focus on the way in which domestic labour relations reflect structural inequalities, together with the explanation that globalised shifts in reproductive labour are driven by changes in the realm of production, has ensured that the outsourcing of care within lower-class households where mothers remain present has, thus far, been overlooked. Moreover, within this dominant theoretical framework, domestic workers are understood to reflect the already established socially privileged position of the employer, as opposed to being the means through which one becomes established. Consequently, the social aspirations of the employing household – which animate many of the extensive consumption practices widely observed in El Austro – have perhaps been downplayed.²⁸ Thus, the argument that 'a man's departure does not usually involve a significant reorganization of the household in the country of origin' prevails.²⁹

This paper offers an alternative position, and shows that the Jimeño shift in orientation from production to consumption is resulting in a reorganisation of household relations. Drawing on the ethnographic record, I emphasise aspiration over function and fluidity over structure as I demonstrate that women are using the opportunities afforded by remittances and the physical absence of men to remake their households in a manner that enhances their

²³ Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration*, p. 23. ²⁴ Pérez Orozco, *Global Perspectives*, p. 5.

²⁵ Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration*, p. 29.

²⁶ Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work*; María De La Luz Ibarra, 'Mexican Immigrant Women and the New Domestic Labor', in Segura and Zavella (eds.), *Women and Migration*, pp. 286–305.

²⁷ Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration*, p. 29.

²⁸ See, for example, Miles, *From Cuenca to Queens*; Kyle, *Transnational Peasants*; and Pribilsky, *La Chulla Vida*.

²⁹ Pérez Orozco, *Global Perspectives*, p. 10.

social status. They thereby reduce their own burden of care, and in doing so create the means by which women of the same social class become socially differentiated. Yet, as these relations are shaped by remittance flows and the migratory success of husbands and sons, I further show that Jimena engagement with new fields of labour can both reinforce and challenge gendered care roles. I thus demonstrate that the shift in female relations is ultimately dependent on the successful performance of men in the transnational waged labour market, and suggest that one of the consequences of, and possible factors informing, household reorganisation is the enhancement of male reputation in the home community. I consequently reflect on the extent to which male migration compounds 'the gender paradox' and reiterates the established gender division of labour.³⁰

Domestic Labour Relations: Full-Time and Casual Work

As has been noted in other parts of El Austro, transnational households invoke a hierarchy of expenditure in relation to remittances, with the repayment of debt and household construction taking priority, followed by children's education and consumer goods.³¹ A similar pattern emerges in Jima, and once villas are, at least partially, constructed and the majority of debt is paid, the head of the household, with the consent of her migrant kin, will purchase care, education and resources for her children, in addition to further items for the home, particularly labour-saving kitchen appliances. As part of this process she will also look to employ a full-time, live-in 'girl', as they are commonly called, and casual domestic workers to discharge the more laborious household duties. This hierarchy of remittance expenditure is not, however, strictly sequential; the construction and extension of villas, and children's care, are ongoing processes, and the employment of care labour occurs in parallel with, and supports, expenditure in these areas. During the fieldwork period, a small but increasing number of women employed live-in girls, and although the majority of homes were without this level of service, this was often attributed to a lack of supply in the labour market as opposed to a lack of employer resources. Moreover, the majority of households in Jima, even some of the least prosperous, employed casual domestic workers. Thus, although it is not possible to quantify, with confidence, the average share of total household income spent on care labour in relation to other areas of expenditure, a direct correlation between the length of time households have been in receipt of remittances and their expenditure on domestic labour can be discerned.

³⁰ Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration*.

³¹ Kyle, *Transnational Peasants*; Pribilsky, *La Chulla Vida*.

Jimeñas employ skilled and unskilled, full- and part-time, live-in and casual, and male and female workers to complete both exceptional jobs, including one-off construction activities, and the daily tasks required to ensure the smooth running of the household. Thus, contrary to Nett's Weber-inspired prediction that the shift to mechanisation and modernisation would lead to the demise of the servant class in Ecuador, increased prosperity in Jima is creating a new range of 'mistress-servant' relations.³² In the initial part of this paper I explore these relations, highlighting their fluidity and the tensions which arise as heads of households seek to define their new role as employers of less prosperous members of their own 'mestizo peasant' class. My discussion is focused predominantly on female workers as, in this context, men are not employed for care or other domestic activities, and any labour they perform tends to be short-term and transitory. Domestic workers, both casual and full-time 'girls', are engaged for a range of intermittent household and agricultural chores including weeding, sowing, harvesting, polishing wooden floors, spring cleaning and light construction. Additional workers are also sought on festive and ritual occasions, when an extra two to seven workers will be tasked with preparing, cleaning and decorating the house and cooking food. In addition to these exceptional tasks, 'girls' fulfil a number of other roles including cleaning, cooking family meals, feeding livestock, running errands and keeping the children in order. They appear to have the most ambiguous positions within households; this is exacerbated by their live-in status, the way they often bring their own children into their employer's home and, in contrast to their part-time and casual counterparts, the fact that they are consistently younger and tend not to originate from the village or have any pre-established social connections to their employer's household. Consequently they rarely form part of a Jimeña's social network, either before or after their employment. I thereby refer to these workers as exogenous, and by comparing their working situation to that of casual workers I aim to demonstrate how the reconfiguring of household labour relations is simultaneously creating, asserting and blurring new social boundaries of distinction.

Live-in domestic servants: Elena and Susana

Elena is Susana's 'girl'. She is in her early thirties with two young children, and had lived with her parents in a neighbouring community before moving into Susana's house. Elena's husband had recently departed for New York and, as her remittance flow was not yet established, she had sought work as a domestic

³² Emily M. Nett, 'The Servant Class in a Developing Country: Ecuador', *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, 8: 3 (1966), pp. 437–52.

and agricultural labourer in order to support her family and make payments against the loan they had taken to fund her husband's crossing into the United States. Unlike Susana's casual workers, who all live in Jima and have a historical relationship to her household through kinship, land and exchange relations, Elena did not know Susana before starting her job; she acquired her position through a chain of contacts, before moving herself and her seven-year-old daughter, Jenny, into the household on a full-time basis. Jenny was soon enrolled at Jima's primary school and quickly became a playmate of Susana's youngest children, and Susana seemingly treats her in the same way as she cares for her own children: attending the school sports day to cheer on the young girl when Elena was busy in the house, plaiting her hair, helping her with her schoolwork, and chastising her when she misbehaves.

Elena works long hours, often rising before six in the morning to prepare the children's breakfasts and get them ready for school, and her list of tasks, which she performs as part of her daily routine, and also on Susana's orders, frequently ensures that she does not stop working until late into the evening. Her duties are numerous – in addition to cooking breakfast, lunch and, frequently, dinner for the household's human inhabitants, she is responsible for caring for the few livestock that Susana keeps for her own household consumption, a role which involves the laborious tasks of cutting grass with a scythe for the guinea pigs, carrying buckets of swill and finding fresh common pasture for the pigs, boiling bones and pasta for the dogs, and milking the cow. Elena also does most of the cleaning and can often be found in the kitchen washing pots or with a mop, broom or scrubbing brush in her hand, although she does leave the house occasionally, usually to fulfil an errand on Susana's orders. Meanwhile, Susana, who does not like to rise early in the cool mornings, spends a large proportion of her days knitting, chatting on the telephone, watching television, and taking tea with guests. The rest of her time is spent supervising her children's homework and her workers' activities, in addition to managing her construction affairs, and she will occasionally spend a day in the nearby city of Cuenca sourcing building supplies and workers, attending meetings and shopping for household goods, soft furnishings and children's clothes and toys. This is not to say that Susana does not participate at all in everyday household chores, for she too can often be found with a broom in her hand – although, rather than being on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor, she will be making a show of sweeping her front porch while exaggerating fatigue and complaining about '*mucho trabajo*' (a lot of work). She also often works alongside Elena in the preparation of afternoon and evening meals, although a division of labour is discernible, with Elena performing the more laborious tasks and Susana directing.

Despite the division of labour, their relationship does not, at first glance, appear to be strictly one of mistress and servant, as the women share ribald

jokes, make fun of each other and eat together with their children on informal, everyday occasions. They seem to have formed a strong and harmonious friendship and, on the occasions when they are joined by Susana's other domestic part-time workers, all the women sit around the kitchen table, chatting about the weather and their favourite soap operas, sharing village gossip, and laughing about the failings of men and children. Apart from her infrequent free days when she visits her parents, Elena spends her limited leisure time with Susana and her family, and they can often all be found in the private television lounge on the first floor of the house. Moreover, both Elena and her daughter participate – as do all of Susana's other part-time workers employed for the occasion in question – in the household's fiestas and ritual celebrations, joining in with the general dancing, drinking and card-playing which inevitably occurs at these events. This was particularly evident during Carnival, when Elena joined the children and Susana in their flour and water fights, and during Easter celebrations, when the entire household attended Mass together.

On festive and ritual occasions, however, Susana and Elena's relationship appears less affective as Elena waits on the family and responds promptly to any orders given by Susana or her guests. Moreover, on closer examination, the women have distinct spatial practices and tend to keep to their individual domains. This is evident in their living and sleeping arrangements, for while Elena and Jenny have access to the more private upstairs rooms of the house, their shared bedroom is on the more public ground floor, as is their bathroom, which is situated opposite the front door in the public salon; by contrast, Susana, her sons and high-status guests sleep in rooms with private en-suite bathrooms on the more intimate first floor. Both women tend to keep to their own spaces in the house, with Susana enjoying her leisure time and managing her affairs in the upstairs rooms and Elena working on the ground floor. The exception to this is the kitchen, which the women share, though at times uneasily; Susana often appears reluctant to surrender control of this source of female empowerment, and the two women often bicker over the correct method of preparing food, the level of stocks in the store cupboard and the need to replace gas bottles.³³ Mini-battles are waged over seemingly trivial issues, such as the volume and channel of the radio, and Susana commonly interrupts Elena in her tasks in order to correct her method, telling Elena she wants it done 'her way'. Likewise, Elena sometimes corrects Susana in her

³³ See Lynn Harbottle, *Food for Health, Food for Wealth: The Performance of Ethnic and Gender Identities by Iranian Settlers in Britain* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000); and Mary J. Weismantel, *Food, Gender and Poverty in the Ecuadorian Andes* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

activities, although these interruptions tend to be more suggestive than dictatorial.

Susana struggles at times with her relationship with Elena, and while she does not appear reticent in giving orders, she often seems exasperated when Elena does not conform or perform as expected, confessing to me on occasion that she ‘doesn’t understand that girl’. On one particular occasion, Elena did not appear back at work for three days after a sanctioned day off at her parents’ house, and Susana vented her frustration, telling me that she did not know what to do for the best, had tried calling but to no avail, and was unsure of how to reprimand Elena on her return. The employment of Elena evidently represents a new type of social relation for Susana and the multiple, at times contradictory, ways she manages the relationship indicate her own uncertainties as to the correct manner in which to proceed. The relationship between Susana and her casual workers appears easier to manage, however, and she, like her friend Sonia, employs a number of casual workers.

Casual domestic labour: Doña Luisa and Sonia

Doña Luisa is over 70 years old, and lives alone in a small adobe building on the neighbouring plot of land to Sonia. Sonia and her sister Felicia grew up with Doña Luisa, who is a blood relative on their recently deceased mother’s side, and the women still occasionally call her ‘Mama Luisa’ and seek her advice on personal and household matters. She is consequently invited to all family ritual and celebratory events at Sonia’s house, where she eats in the dining room with other close family members and high-status guests. Such is her familiarity and intimacy with the household that in the early stages of my fieldwork I categorised Doña Luisa as a family friend or kin group member until I realised she was being employed by Sonia and receiving payment for her labours.

Like Elena, Doña Luisa’s recompense is not solely in dollars, and she also receives meals, social invitations, appliances and building materials, wood from Sonia’s demolished outhouses and festive food. Thus, her wages often comprise a combination of surplus goods and money, and in return she prepares festive food for the household and partakes in light labour, such as polishing floors, harvesting corn and cleaning. As she worked alongside Sonia’s live-in worker, Doña Luisa’s relationship with Sonia’s household initially puzzled me – she did not fall definitively within any specific category I recognised, but rather appeared to shift across boundaries, being a paid domestic worker one day and an intimate household member the next. Her senior age and blood relation with Sonia’s mother exacerbate the ambiguity of Doña Luisa’s position, with both Sonia and Felicia often deferring to the older woman, particularly in matters of land use and animal husbandry.

This seeming ambiguity is illustrated by Doña Luisa's spatial and commensal practices, and unlike Elena's behaviour in Susana's home, she often eats her meals with the family in the private dining room and not with the other workers in the kitchen. Moreover, she attends festive celebrations regardless of whether she is employed to do so or not, and unlike Elena, she is welcome and comfortable in the intimate spaces of the house, often sitting and taking tea with Sonia in the private family space and balcony upstairs. Thus, although she completes a number of the same household tasks as full-time servants and receives payments for her labours, Doña Luisa's relationship with Sonia is even more fluid than that of Elena and Susana, and she moves seamlessly through different roles and positions of status within the household. This shifting across categories sometimes occurs within a matter of minutes; Doña Luisa can be observed sitting at the head of Sonia's private dining table conversing with her guests at one moment, then washing up and taking the scraps out to the pigs the next.

This is not always the case, however, and at times Doña Luisa joins the other casual and full-time workers who never or rarely eat in the private dining room with high-status guests, despite being intimate members of Sonia's social network. This group includes Margarita, who is one of the few women in the village whose husband has not migrated; she and her spouse eke out a comparatively meagre living performing casual waged labour for a number of female employers. Margarita often appears at Sonia's house to work during fiestas, and she frequently takes responsibility for preparing and cooking celebratory meals and helping with the cleaning. Her payment is in both money and cooked food, although on occasions when a pig is being roasted, her husband will carry out the butchering and the couple will take away a large hunk of uncooked meat. Margarita also does the occasional specialist cleaning job, such as sanding and waxing the extensive wooden floors of Sonia's new house, and after completing her duties it is common to find her with Sonia and the other women who have been working in the house that day, sitting around the table drinking tea and gossiping in a friendly manner.

As with the relationship between Elena and Susana, when higher-status guests are present, the atmosphere is less relaxed and Sonia starts to give more vocal orders, using a sharper tone of voice which seems to be reserved for these occasions. During my time in Jima, I never heard any domestic workers complain about this contradictory treatment, and all the women employed appeared to have a tacit understanding that their relationship with their employer would shift depending on the setting and the presence of others; on occasions when the employer was alone or with other workers they could be jovial together, but in the presence of others, particularly high-status guests, the relationship would be more akin to that of a mistress and her servants. This distinction, as I discuss in the latter section of this paper, is even more

pronounced when men are present. Thus the relationship between domestic workers and their employers shifts across boundaries and social categories, with workers alternatively appearing to be servant, intimate acquaintance, high-status guest and kin.

The ambiguous position of domestic workers has been noted elsewhere, although these scholars generally argue that the ambiguity arises because of the inherent tensions between the perception of money as impersonal, the intimate nature of domestic labour, and the ideology that this form of labour should be freely given.³⁴ However, as detailed below, the shifting categories of Jimeño domestic workers remind us of the dangers of privileging the payment of wages in the domestic context, as other social practices, including the division of labour, dining arrangements and the use of space, also facilitate the articulation of social distance and closeness.

*Closeness and Distinction: Remaking Household Hierarchies through the
Division of Labour, Kinship and Space*

It is evident that Jimeñas remake household hierarchies in the absence of men through their division of labour and performance of leisure, with heads of households taking on managerial roles within the home and enjoying increasing leisure time by outsourcing care to domestic servants. A similar process has been noted by Gill, who states that mistresses in La Paz ‘construct an elaborate division of labor whereby they control the intellectual work and then assign the menial chores to servants’.³⁵ The motivations behind this, she explains, are mistresses’ aspirations to be perceived as ‘refined women’, and she thereby not only emphasises the role social mobility plays in informing household labour relations, but also highlights the low social value assigned to manual domestic work. This low status is reinforced in Jima by workers’ own perceptions of their position, and the difficulties employers face when looking to source labour. Concerns over status are particularly pronounced among live-in girls, with casual workers more commonly casting their labour relations in terms of reciprocity and friendship between households, and this is illustrated by the way girls endeavour to ensure that their employ as domestic workers is transitional.

After approximately eight months of working as a live-in girl, Justina did not return from a family visit. Following six days of absence and silence, in which

³⁴ See, for example, Gill, ‘Painted Faces’; Jack Goody, *Production and Reproduction: A Comparative Study of the Domestic Domain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Elizabeth Jelin, ‘Migration and Labor Force Participation of Latin American Women: The Domestic Servants in the Cities’, *Signs*, 3: 1 (1977), pp. 129–41; and Nett, ‘The Servant Class in a Developing Country’.

³⁵ Gill, *Precarious Dependencies*, p. 89.

her employer, Clara, became increasingly frustrated and unsure how to proceed, she returned to collect her belongings and resign her position. I met Justina some months later when she was employed in a gift shop in Cuenca city, and asked her why she had left her domestic employ. 'It's just not good work', she responded. 'This is a better place, with better people – it's more respectful, more cultured.' Clara, meanwhile, not only took Justina's resignation as a personal slight, telling me repeatedly that she 'didn't understand it' and asking for my opinion on why Justina had left, but also faced significant difficulties replacing her. After three months, Clara had still not located a live-in girl; a young woman named Zoila had been employed on a trial basis, but she left four days later, citing that she 'wasn't sure if [she wanted] to do this type of work'. Subsequently, Clara resorted to delegating a number of Justina's tasks to her own children, which involved taking them out of school on occasion, relying more heavily on her casual workers for quotidian tasks and neglecting some tasks altogether. For example, on one visit I was prohibited from visiting the huts that contained her guinea pig stock, with Clara stating that they were 'very dirty' and 'not very nice'. I learnt later that many of the animals had died from neglect, and this suggests that Clara went to significant lengths to ensure she was not seen engaged in the 'menial' manual work previously performed by Justina.

Manual work, in general, is synonymous with poverty and indigeneity in Jimeño society; this observation is also noted in Colloredo-Mansfield's study of Otavaleños in Northern Ecuador and by Ortiz, who explains that wealthy members of the Paez peasantry in Colombia are scornful of manual labour practices, particularly those which are performed collectively.³⁶ Manual and collective labour in Ecuador has commonly been cast in terms of ethnic and racial relations, and this parallels the framework, discussed above, utilised by scholars working in the field of domestic labour and migration.³⁷ Yet Jimeñas themselves rarely invoke this paradigm, although their reluctance to participate in manual labour and their enthusiasm to employ others suggest that, similar to Gill's observation, manual labour is socially devalued while 'intellectual' work is elevated.

Not all manual labour is equally regarded, however, and Jimeñas do not classify the labour their male kin perform in the United States as lower-status work (despite a predominance of jobs in construction and as waiters), with

³⁶ Rudi Colloredo-Mansfield, *The Native Leisure Class: Consumption and Cultural Creativity in the Andes* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Sutti Ortiz, *Uncertainties in Peasant Farming: A Colombian Case* (London: Athlone Press, 1973).

³⁷ Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work*; Bunster and Chaney, *Sellers and Servants*; Gill, *Precarious Dependencies*; Glenn, 'From Servitude to Service Work'; Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*; Pérez Orozco, *Global Perspectives*; Segura and Zavella, *Women and Migration*; Stephen, *Transborder Lives*.

many expressing contentment that their kin have found 'good' jobs. Moreover, a number were keen for mining in the region to be expanded by international investment, explaining that it would create jobs for their sons and husbands. Thus, while the form of work men perform is 'manual', it is located in an exogenous and urban domain, and this, I suggest, helps differentiate their work from that which occurs in the local, rural domain, and in the domestic sphere. Furthermore, their labour is also performed in 'public', whereas domestic labour is performed in the 'private' spaces of the home, and this has led to a number of scholars arguing that, due to the manner in which the public is elevated over the private, reproductive labour is socially devalued.³⁸ Hence, it is not just the location, type and context of work that informs its social value, but also the gender of the actors who perform it.

Enmeshed within this hierarchy of labour is the Jimeña ambition of not only being a manager, but also living a life of leisure. As Colloredo-Mansfield notes, leisure is perceived as a cultural characteristic of *mestizaje*, and for newly prosperous peasant families the countryside has become a place of leisure, not labour.³⁹ In this context, Jimeñas can be regarded as ideologically leisurely; their ambition is to ensure that they no longer have to work manually in the rural domain, be self-sufficient or reciprocate communal labour exchange agreements, and in this respect they appear to epitomise Veblen's definition of the 'leisure class'.⁴⁰ Subsequently they create distinction by increasing their leisure time while removing that of their employees; in facilitating their employers' leisure, domestic workers thus become an important status symbol themselves.⁴¹ As Anderson concludes, the domestic worker 'is fulfilling a role, and crucial to that role is her reproduction of the female employer's status (middle-class, non-labourer, clean) in contrast to herself (worker, degraded, dirty)'.⁴² The problematic notion that it is only female status that is significant is one to which I return in the following section.

In addition to these explicit labour divisions within the household, Jimeñas use other, more subtle mechanisms to define the nature of their relationship with their domestic workers, one of which is to formulate it in hierarchical kinship terms. Susana calls Elena by her Christian name but also refers to her as 'the girl', a term commonly used in reference to young and teenage children in the home, while Sonia calls Doña Luisa 'Mama Luisa'. The manner in

³⁸ Deere, *Household and Class Relations*; Frederick Engels, *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State* (London: Pathfinder Books, 1972); Sherry Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', in Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (eds.), *Women, Culture and Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 67–87.

³⁹ Colloredo-Mansfield, *The Native Leisure Class*, p. 207.

⁴⁰ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, 1994 [1899]).

⁴¹ Young, 'The Myth of Being "Like a Daughter"', p. 370.

⁴² Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work*, p. 2.

which kinship terminology is utilised by employers has been oft noted, with Young stressing that the idiom of the family serves to naturalise inequalities based upon age and gender.⁴³ Her account of servants in middle-class homes in Lima demonstrates the way domestic workers are referred to 'like daughters' in order to promote respect, devotion and obedience, but unlike consanguineous children, servants are not allowed to mature into women and will not be retained if they have children of their own. Thus, articulating the relation as kinship both acknowledges the physical intimacy of employees and facilitates their incorporation into the household, while reiterating a hierarchy founded upon age and consanguinity.

This process is less explicit in Jima, where workers bring their children into the household, and workers and employers call each other by their Christian names – although by referring to an exogenous domestic worker as a 'girl', employers do appear to be articulating their own senior position within the household. Further distinctions in seniority are also created between exogenous and endogamous workers, with those originally drawn from inside household networks being referred to by their Christian name or as Señora. A hierarchy, based on linguistic deference, thus becomes apparent, but only in the way workers are referred to when discussed with a third party and not in the manner in which they are addressed directly.⁴⁴ Hence there is a degree of confusion, with employers seemingly reluctant to explicitly enforce a name-based hierarchy in the presence of their exogenous workers.

Yet kinship is not solely expressed by naming practices and kin categorisation, but also by commensal relations.⁴⁵ The manner in which Elena, Margarita and Doña Luisa eat at the same tables as Susana and Sonia suggests that they are considered intimate members of their households. Moreover, in contrast to accounts of master–servant relations in more explicitly stratified contexts, there are no prohibitions on the food that domestic workers consume in Jima.⁴⁶ All household members share the same ritual and daily dishes, a point that, especially in relation to the symbolically laden dish of *cuy* (roast guinea pig), further enmeshes workers into the

⁴³ See, for example, Sara Dickey, 'Permeable Homes: Domestic Service Household Space and the Vulnerability of Class Boundaries in Urban India', *American Ethnologist*, 27: 2 (2000), pp. 462–89; Gill, *Precarious Dependencies*; and specifically Young, 'The Myth of Being "Like a Daughter"'.

⁴⁴ See Judith Rollins, *Between Women: Domesticity and Their Employers* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985) for a discussion of linguistic deference.

⁴⁵ Stephen Brush, *Mountain, Field and Family: The Economy and Human Ecology of an Andean Valley* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977); Janet Carsten, *The Heat of the Hearth: The Process of Kinship in a Malay Fishing Village* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁴⁶ See Frøystad, 'Master–Servant Relations'; and Rubbo and Taussig, 'Up off Their Knees'.

household.⁴⁷ However, festive dining also presents a context in which a subtle hierarchy is expressed between workers, household guests and employers, with the latter two groups eating together in the private dining room and the former remaining in the kitchen, often accompanied by the household's children, a practice which can be seen to compound their 'junior' status. Doña Luisa could be regarded as an exception as she takes her place in the private dining room, although I suggest that an acknowledgment of her referential name 'Mama', which recognises both her consanguinity and generational status, explains her presence at the 'top table'. Thus, subtle boundaries in the spatial practices of dining emerge and serve to create distance between employers and workers.

A similar argument has been made in a number of guises, with Weismantel observing subtle hierarchies at play in the manner in which diners are served by the head of the household and noting that older women have more authority over the kitchen than younger ones, and Qayum and Ray highlighting that employers maintain distinction from their domestic workers through their bodily and spatial practices.⁴⁸ The latter explain that, in large homes, servants are confined to their quarters, but in small, urban middle-class flats, where both worker and employer have greater physical proximity, employers create distinction by ensuring that servants do not sit on sofas but remain on the floor or on low stools, and do not use the same bathroom or eat in the same room as the family. Although Qayum and Ray's study is located in the intensely stratified society and cramped spaces of Calcutta, their observations are enlightening to the Jimeño context, as Jimeño employers confine their workers and themselves to distinct areas of the home and seek to create boundaries through their dining, sleeping and bathing practices. Thus, while the distinctions may not be as explicit as in highly stratified contexts and Jimeño domestic workers do not live in the kennel-type conditions highlighted by Rubbo and Taussig, Jimeña employers are, I suggest, attempting to create boundaries between themselves and their workers through their use of space, albeit in a more subtle manner.⁴⁹

Aside from the newness of the exogenous worker–employer relation and the ways in which workers sometimes challenge and define boundaries by

⁴⁷ See Emma-Jayne Abbotts, 'It Doesn't Taste as Good from the Pet Shop: Guinea Pig Consumption and the Performance of Class and Kinship in Highland Ecuador and New York City', in *Food, Culture and Society*, 14: 2 (2011), pp. 205–24; Nicole Bourque, 'Eating Your Words: Communicating with Food in the Ecuadorian Andes', in Joy Hendry and C. W. Watson (eds.), *An Anthropology of Indirect Communication* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 85–100; and Weismantel, *Food, Gender and Poverty*.

⁴⁸ Seemin Qayum and Raka Ray, 'Grappling with Modernity: India's Respectable Classes and the Culture of Domestic Servitude', *Ethnography*, 4: 4 (2003), pp. 520–55; Weismantel, *Food, Gender and Poverty*. ⁴⁹ Rubbo and Taussig, 'Up off Their Knees', p. 15.

attempting to do things 'their way', an additional probable explanation for the closeness and subtlety of the distinctions between workers and their employers is the fact that both originate from the same social group. As there are no clearly demarcated class and ethnic boundaries in these household relations, the only evident distinguishing factor is the individual's level of income, yet, being founded on remittances, prosperity is not only newly acquired and at times precarious, but is also, potentially, a temporary mode of distinction. Most domestic workers, as Elena and Doña Luisa exemplify, are engaged as domestic workers because their kin have only recently migrated, and as Justina's resignation and Zoila's reluctance illustrate, workers endeavour to ensure that their domestic employment 'phase' is as temporary and transitional as possible. Workers thus have the future aspiration, and capacity, to also become prosperous employers: conversely, a current employer's remittance income may falter. A potential scenario in which employer becomes employee is therefore not inconceivable.

Hence domestic labour relations in Jima have a particular fragile temporality, which is created and exacerbated by the context of migration and an economy fuelled by remittances. It is not possible to state with confidence the extent to which this determines the way employers treat their domestic workers, and as there is an optimistic expectation that all migratory journeys will ultimately be successful and an expressed confidence in the stability of remittance flows, I suspect few employers can imagine a context in which they will have to return to work and their household relations will be reversed. However, their confidence in migration does indicate an implicit understanding that employees may become equals in terms of income, and that the relationship between employer and employee is temporary, rather than structurally embedded. Nevertheless, as it is only the kin of successful migrants who can currently outsource their care, remittances do provide a mode of distinction in the present, even if they may not continue to do so in the future. Thus, despite the (limited) redistribution of wealth created by waged labour, and the ways it enables workers to create an illusion of successful migration by participating in the same consumption practices as their employers, the manner in which remittances are channelled into the employment of care labour facilitates the creation of a clear boundary between successful and less successful transnational households.

I am not suggesting that these modes of distinction are calculated strategies to ensure that those with lower incomes remain indebted to their employers, and there is little evidence to suggest that Jimeñas cast their household relations explicitly in hierarchical terms. Rather, the inequalities invoked appear to stem from the socially mobile aspirations of the heads of households rather than from a concerted attempt to oppress others. Moreover, as can be seen by the contradictions and shifting identities of domestic workers, many

employers appear unsure how to proceed and struggle on occasion to balance their desire for enhanced social status with the temporal fragility and intimate nature of relations within the household. These contradictions are exacerbated by, and highlight, the paradoxical relation between migration and domestic labour. In order to sustain a public image of successful migration and remittance prosperity, women have to source domestic workers, but as this labour is only performed by the female kin of unsuccessful migrants, migratory success stories are built, and rely, upon the premise that a number of male migratory journeys will fail. Hence a contradiction arises between the communal perspective, that migration is the route to prosperity, and a household's need to display its increased income and social mobility. These conclusions suggest that distinctions between households in Jima, while economically founded on the relative achievements of their male members, are being established by women's reorganisation of their household relations. It is therefore to the dynamics of gender that I now turn.

Performing Household Reputation: Gender Relations and Social Aspirations

A question that immediately arises from the Jima ethnography is, 'In what ways would these new household relations be different if men were present?' Furthermore, considering the inclination of the literature on migration and domestic labour towards functional, causal explanations, a secondary question emerges regarding the extent to which the reorganisation of the Jimeño household is rooted in need or aspiration. As the majority of men remain physically absent, there is a risk that answers to these questions will enter the realm of conjecture, although the way labour is organised when migrants return can be illuminating. As indicated above, male kin continue to inform significant household decisions when they are in the United States, and in matters of major construction work – for example, the selection of architects and house design – women continue to seek their husbands' opinions, although they will continue to project-manage the work and source the builders with some autonomy. However, this independence can be curtailed when husbands return.

After 11 years of absence, Don Felipe returned to his Jimeño household and within a day had asserted his control over the way the household was organised and managed. This included moving the furniture so that the television lounge was located on the ground floor rather than the first, and hanging paintings so the home would be 'more like it is in the United States'. He also started to oversee the construction work, which had stalled a little under the supervision of his wife Marina, and over the next few days he could be commonly seen in the garden hunched over plans with the architect, directing builders, and attending supplier meetings. The construction progressed rapidly, driven by

the energy and enthusiasm of Don Felipe, and Marina appeared to happily relinquish her 'productive' role and retire to the television lounge and kitchen, explaining that she was relieved her husband had returned to direct the construction as she had 'too much to do in the home, with the children and everything', and that supervising the building work was 'too tiring and difficult'. The couple did continue to consult each other over the work, however, and evening meals were commonly spent discussing the progress of the construction and designing new projects.

Marina's return to the kitchen did not take the form of manual domestic labour; rather, the presence of casual domestic workers increased, and in addition to the quotidian tasks they were engaged to undertake a greater number of exceptional jobs, including the stripping and waxing of the floors and a thorough 'deep clean' of the kitchen and all its contents. Consequently, from the moment of Don Felipe's arrival to the point of his departure, the house was a hive of activity, with Marina supervising all the domestic chores within the home and Don Felipe managing the construction work. Marina's tone and treatment of her workers also altered during this time; she issued orders briskly, there was a greater level of visible surveillance and inspection, and commensal distinctions were reinforced, with only close family members, including children, being allowed to sit around the private dining table. This shift in dining practices created the most tension between family members; Don Felipe was dismayed that his children expressed a preference for eating in the kitchen with the domestic workers, with whom they had established relations, and he admonished the children, physically coercing them into the dining room and complaining, 'Why do they want to eat in there with them? They [the children] are part of this family – I am their father – and they would rather eat with the workers than with their father! They don't know how to behave'.

This reiteration of boundaries between 'family' and 'workers' in the presence of men, coupled with the observation that wives do not return to their care roles, suggests that the reorganisation of the household is driven by social aspiration as opposed to need. For while it initially appears that Jiméñas need domestic workers to avoid working a 'double day' while men are physically absent, their continuation in employing domestic workers when they are relieved of 'male' roles, in addition to their increasing leisure practices, indicates that the reorganisation of the household is just as much a performance of status as it is motivated by functional labour requirements. As argued above, domestic workers can become important status symbols for upwardly mobile households. However, the manner in which female employers change their behaviour in the presence of senior male kin and higher-status guests suggests that a question, commonly overlooked or assumed, regarding *whose* status is being enhanced warrants further consideration.

Discussions surrounding the employment of domestic workers, in both migratory and non-migratory contexts, generally focus on the mistress–servant relationship, and consequently the relation, as the quotation by Anderson above testifies, is cast as one between women. Perhaps understandably, this is particularly pronounced in contexts in which men are absent, and the potential influence of male kin has been generally disregarded. Yet, as Gill explains, ‘refined’ women are reluctant to engage in waged labour in La Paz as it implies that their husbands are unable to maintain the home; Gill thus indicates how the desired public reputation of men can inform the organisation of the domestic sphere.⁵⁰ Likewise, Pribilsky demonstrates, in reference to children’s celebrations, conspicuous consumption and architectural styles in Jatundeleg, that activities in the household play a critical role in valorising the migratory journey, and ultimately, by extension, the reputation of migrant men.⁵¹ His conclusion indicates that Gill’s argument can be applied to a transnational context, and I too suggest that physically absent men remain symbolically present in Jima through their remittances and influence over major household decisions. Hence they have a continuing relation with the Jimeño household and community. The performance of leisure and employment of domestic workers, therefore, can not only be seen to reflect their wives’ social status, but can also be understood as a potential mechanism through which successful, productive migrants are constituted as such.

Seen through this lens, rather than remaining static as Pérez Orozco concludes, the reorganisation of household labour relations appears to be somewhat inevitable.⁵² Jimeño households are being reorganised not because wives have too great a burden of work, but because they also have aspirations of social mobility for themselves, their children and their ‘absent’ husbands. The employment of domestic workers enhances their own reputations as ‘refined’ women, while also socially reaffirming that their husbands’ and sons’ migratory journeys are leading to increased prosperity, without compromising kin relations. This offers an additional explanatory factor as to the reasons why care labour is hard to source, as, from the perspective of domestic workers, being employed in this role is not only participating in a lower-status practice, but also tantamount to socially acknowledging that your migrant male kin are not as ‘productive’ or ‘successful’ as others. Thus I suggest that, in this context, domestic workers become equatable to the consumer goods employers readily purchase: they facilitate leisure; enhance social status; express the continuing receipt of remittances; and reiterate the success of migrants. However, as people, rather than inanimate consumer objects, domestic workers present employers with unanticipated issues concerning intimacy and distinction, and

⁵⁰ Gill, *Precarious Dependencies*, p. 86.

⁵¹ Pribilsky, *La Chulla Vida*.

⁵² Pérez Orozco, *Global Perspectives*, p. 5.

these employers' contradictory practices suggest that they are learning to make this adjustment and negotiate their relations accordingly.

The association I make between consumer objects and domestic workers is not intended to devalue the actors involved, but rather to highlight the idea that, for Jimeños, the employment of domestic workers is another form of conspicuous consumption, and that viewing the practice in this manner enables the exploration of the aspirational motivations for the reorganisation of the household. Moreover, moving away from an analytical paradigm in which domestic relations are understood solely as a relation between women and extending the frame of reference to incorporate male kin, in order to recognise the complementary relation between the Jimeño household and its migrants, further facilitates the consideration of other, less functional factors. I am not denying that shifting care relations, particularly in a migratory context, are often informed by need – accounts of extended families and paid domestic workers caring for children and the home as a result of mothers entering the realm of waged production make this evident – but I am suggesting that this can lead to assumptions that the absence of men makes no significant difference to household organisation.⁵³ Consequently the role that men play is at best downplayed or at worst ignored, and physical absence is often equated to total absence. I have argued that husbands and sons, although physically absent, remain symbolically present, and that although wives generally have greater autonomy in quotidian tasks and are adopting public roles, men continue to have an influence over household labour relations.

Thus, the Jimeño context provides a different picture to the current understanding of care chains and the relation between migration, gender and domestic labour relations, for it shows that the reorganisation of the household is aspirational, not just functional. Far from being homogenous, women are creating their own labour-based hierarchies, and in doing so are seeking to enhance not only their own social reputation but also that of their kin. Consequently, for the wives of 'productive' migrants, male migration can lead to greater autonomy in their day-to-day lives, new labour roles and social mobility, whereas, for others, 'traditional' reproductive roles are being reinforced and remain devalued. At a surface level, this is a similar argument to that found in the work of Anderson, Glenn and Parreñas, among others.⁵⁴ Yet the remaking of the household in Jima is not a micro-level carbon copy of the waged domestic labour relations found on a global scale, and the feminisation of Jima's productive sphere is not a reflection or reiteration of

⁵³ Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration*; Pérez Orozco, *Global Perspectives*.

⁵⁴ Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work*; Glenn, 'From Servitude to Service Work'. See also Bunster and Chaney, *Sellers and Servants*; Gill, *Precarious Dependencies*; Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*; Pérez Orozco, *Global Perspectives*; Segura and Zavella, *Women and Migration*; and Stephen, *Transborder Lives*.

entrenched racial, ethnic and national inequalities. Rather, different forms of inequalities, between women that were previously understood to be of the same social class, are being established.

As the creation of these new household hierarchies is predicated on remittances, labour inequalities in Jima are intrinsically entangled with the productive labour of men in the United States. Hence, while a number of women appear to be enjoying the 'fruits' of migration, the extent to which gender roles have significantly changed seems to be somewhat limited. The wives of migrants are engaged in both productive and reproductive labour, but they all perform roles that are commonly unwaged, often unseen, and ultimately contribute to and are centred upon the reproduction of the household. Meanwhile, men are the primary and often sole providers of household income, and as Marina exemplifies, women relinquish 'male' roles once migrants return, and they reorient back to the private domain, albeit in a managerial capacity. For the female kin of 'successful' migrants, male migration facilitates a less burdensome, in terms of manual labour, and potentially empowering lifestyle, yet for those women whose spouses are either recent or 'failed' migrants, the burden of care is being compounded and their low social position reinforced. There is a clear everyday disparity between women, but this is perhaps not as great as that which remains between male and female roles. Women, whether they are employers or workers, ultimately continue to be wedded to the realm of reproduction, and there is little ethnographic evidence to suggest that male migration is leading to significant realignment of structural gender conventions.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have been interested in exploring how the newly prosperous wives of migrants are using their remittance income to reorganise household hierarchies in the physical absence of men. The employment of domestic workers, I have argued, enables heads of households to create a division of labour in which they participate in higher-status managerial work and purchase leisure, while their workers perform lower-status manual tasks. The increased leisure time that the kin of successful migrants enjoy, together with the manner in which they direct their workers and fail to re-engage with manual labour when migrants return, suggests that the reorganisation of the household is not only rooted in the functional need to alleviate an additional burden of labour, as the majority of scholarship on migration, domestic work and care chains concludes, but is also motivated by social aspirations. Thus I have sought to emphasise the significant role that social status, of both men and women, plays in reshaping household relations. I have also argued for a broadening of the lens of analysis to include the relation between female employers and their husbands, in contrast to assuming that the

mistress–servant relation is purely one between women. This, I have contended, more adequately reflects the interdependence of women and their migrant kin, and recognises that men's physical absence does not equate to total absence. The ethnographic literature on migration from El Austro demonstrates that the conspicuous consumption practices of transnational households valorises the migratory journey, yet, to date, analyses of the relation between domestic labour relations and migration have rarely been viewed through this lens. I have looked to use the knowledge gained from these two currently disparate bodies of literature to argue that, in many ways, the employment of domestic workers is another form of conspicuous consumption, and to demonstrate that taking this approach to household labour can provide an additional insight into the interplay between gender, migration and domestic labour. Thus, I have sought to bring men back into a picture that is generally presented as female-centric, and have argued that physically absent migrants continue to be symbolically present and to inform the reorganisation of household hierarchies.

In exploring the ways in which household hierarchies are created and established not only through the division of labour but also through the idiom of kinship, dining arrangements and spatial practices, I have also been concerned with emphasising the fluidity and uncertainty of household relations, and the tensions that arise as new employers look to assert and maintain their domestic authority while maintaining an enhanced social status. The intimacy of the household does mask real inequalities, although these relations are not as explicit or as structurally embedded in Jima as in other social contexts, and the dynamic between worker and employer is subject to a continual process of negotiation. It is evident that domestic waged labour relations in Jima have a temporal fragility and do not reproduce established class relations, although they are emerging as a mode of distinction between the newly prosperous households of successful migrants and those for which migration has been a less successful strategy. Because of this fragility, I have withheld from making any firm conclusions regarding the extent of structural change and the formulation of new class relations; indeed, as the reluctance of workers to be engaged in long-term domestic work illustrates, relations are somewhat transitory rather than structurally entrenched. Yet, while they may be transitory, these relations remain a critical mechanism through which remittances are transformed and used by the newly prosperous to differentiate themselves from 'other' members of the mestizo peasantry. The recognition that it is male productive labour and remittance income that enables these shifting relations indicates that, while household relations are being reconfigured and some women are enjoying increased autonomy and leisure on an everyday basis, structural gender roles are not being significantly restructured.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Mujeres jefas de hogar en la comunidad exportadora de migrantes de Jima, Ecuador, utilizan las remesas para emplear a trabajadoras domésticas. Ya que tanto las trabajadoras como las 'patronas' tienen un mismo origen de clase campesino y mestizo, estas nuevas relaciones laborales no reflejan desigualdades de clase, sino más bien emergen como una nueva forma de distinción entre los nuevos hogares prósperos y aquellos para los que la migración ha sido una estrategia menos exitosa. Esto lleva a una fragilidad y fluidez temporal en las relaciones en el hogar, en la medida en que las trabajadoras y las empleadoras buscan definir sus roles y establecer jerarquías. Las empleadoras negocian estas tensiones no sólo para reducir su propia carga de trabajo, sino porque también las trabajadoras domésticas son un símbolo de movilidad social y ayudan a acrecentar la reputación de los hombres migrantes. Entonces, mientras que los hombres están ausentes físicamente, éstos continúan influyendo en la reorganización del hogar jimeño, y no parece ser que los roles de género se estén realineando de una forma estructuralmente significativa.

Spanish keywords: trabajo doméstico, remesas, migración, tiempo libre, relaciones de género, jerarquías domésticas, cadenas de cuidado, Ecuador

Portuguese abstract. Em uma comunidade que exporta migrantes chamada Jima, no Equador, mulheres chefes de família utilizam remessas de dinheiro para empregar trabalhadores domésticos. Como tanto os trabalhadores e quanto as 'patrões' tem origens na mesma classe camponesa mestiça, essas novas relações de trabalho não refletem desigualdades de classe embutidas, mas um novo modo de diferenciação entre famílias recém-afluentes e aquelas nas quais a emigração foi uma estratégia menos bem-sucedida. Isso empresta uma característica temporária, frágil e fluida, às relações domésticas nas quais trabalhadora e empregadora buscam definir seus papéis e estabelecer hierarquias. Empregadoras negociam essas tensões não apenas para reduzir sua própria carga de trabalho, mas também devido ao fato de que ter trabalhadores domésticos simboliza mobilidade social e ajuda a destacar a reputação dos homens que emigraram. Desse modo, embora os homens estejam ausentes fisicamente, eles continuam a influenciar a reorganização da unidade doméstica jimenha, havendo pouco para sugerir que os papéis dos gêneros estão se reconstituindo de uma maneira estruturalmente significativa.

Portuguese keywords: trabalho doméstico, remessas monetárias, migração, lazer, relações de gênero, hierarquias domésticas, *care chain* ('rede de cuidados'), Equador