



American Journal of Interdisciplinary Research and Innovation (AJIRI)

ISSN: 2833-2237 (ONLINE)

VOLUME 5 ISSUE 2 (2026)

**PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA**

Trans-nanay: Reconfiguration of *Ilaw ng Tahanan* in Filipino Cinema

D. Imperial¹, J. R. C. Lizardo^{2*}, C. J. Lopez², M. J. Lozano²

Article Information

Received: March 03, 2026**Accepted:** May 07, 2026**Published:** June 09, 2026

Keywords

*Filipino Cinema, Gender
Performativity, Queer, Queer
Space Theory, Trans-Nanay*

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the trans-nanay is reconstituted in contemporary Philippine cinema as a redefinition of motherhood beyond biological and heteronormative expectations. It addresses the gap in representing transgender maternal identities in Filipino cultural texts. Using an interpretive qualitative design, the study analyzes three films *Die Beautiful* (2016), *Mamu: And a Mother Too* (2018), and *Call Me Mother* (2025) through guided content analysis informed by Judith Butler's gender performativity and Aaron Betsky's queer space theory. Findings reveal that trans-nanay motherhood is constructed through bodily, emotional, and economic labor, where maternal identity is performed through sustained caregiving rather than biological ties. The films also depict space as a site of negotiation, where domestic and social environments shape inclusion, exclusion, and resistance. These representations position trans-nanay characters as active agents who create care and belonging despite marginalization. The study highlights that motherhood in Philippine cinema is relational, performative, and contested, contributing to Gender Studies, Queer Theory, and Film Studies. It argues that the trans-nanay embodies the *ilaw ng tahanan* through resilience, relational labor, and survival within constrained social spaces.

INTRODUCTION

A trans-nanay is a transgender mother who constructs a negotiation between identity, care, and parenting practices in daily life that redefines motherhood beyond the traditional gender roles. According to Bower-Brown (2022), transgender and non-binary parents are actively involved in challenging the gendered perceptions of parenting and developing identities that transcend the idea of motherhood and fatherhood. The Philippine case is no exception, with transgender characters increasingly represented in the film industry in the last several years, as cultural visibility has changed. Yet, these increasing representations also indicate that the media can both challenge and affirm the established gender ideologies and frame how people perceive the existence of transgender identities (Thomson, 2021). These depictions are thus important platforms through which to consider the ways in which transgender people are placed within the cultural discourses instead of being identities outside these discourses.

Movies like *Mamu: And a Mother Too* (2018), *Die Beautiful* (2016), and *Call Me Mother* (2025) will disrupt traditional conceptions of the mother by introducing the trans-nanay as a redefined mother. But there is a tendency to depict them in an ambiguous and fragmented way, the inability to be conceptually clear in portraying transgender motherhood (Halberstam, 2018). This uncertainty reflects, more generally, the situation in society, where trans parenthood is part of ongoing negotiations and redefinitions under strict cultural norms (Dantas *et al.*,

2024). In this regard, cinematic images not only reflect trans motherhood, but they also replicate the cultural conflicts between its acknowledgment and validity. Thus, the films not only break but also reveal the boundaries of the biological and heteronormative ideals ingrained in the concept of the Filipino mother.

Sealing this gap, the current research explores how trans-nanay is portrayed in the selected Filipino movies, with a special focus on how caregiving labor and spatial conditions shape maternal identity. In particular, the paper analyzes how these representations make trans-nanay into embodiments of care, survival, and resilience, and how the experience takes place within spaces of recognition, exclusion, and resistance. In this way, the paper will become a part of the current debates in Gender Studies, Queer Theory, and Film Studies, providing a more detailed approach to motherhood as a construct, a process, and a contentious phenomenon in the modern Philippine cinema.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist and queer family research demonstrates that motherhood is not a fixed or stable entity linked to "female bodies" but is a social construct that is formed through care, embodied and through power relations (Averett, 2021; Allen & Mendez, 2018; Dahl & Gabb, 2020). Theories of queer and trans parenthood challenge the notion of a biological sex binary and the assumption of gendered parenting by women and men, and establish that these theories do not accurately represent gay and

¹ Association Professor, College of Teacher Education, St. John Paul II College of Davao, Philippines

² Student, College of Teacher Education, St. John Paul II College of Davao, Philippines

* Corresponding author's e-mail: janrey_lizardo@sjp2cd.edu.ph

trans parenthood nor apply to parenting by parents of other genders (Averett, 2021; Dahl & Gabb, 2020; Goldberg, 2022). This de-essentialisation of motherhood is a key factor in understanding trans-nanay as a figure who mothers not only in practice and recognition but also by biology.

Further, queer family and kinship scholarship demonstrates that LGBTQ parents make families in a range of ways: they become parents through pregnancy, adoption, foster care, co parenting, and “chosen” kinship; they face stigma and negative responses from the state, institutions, and community for their parenthood; and LGBTQ parents negotiate cisnormative institutions, such as childbirth, marriage, and adoption, which limit their ability to parent (Goldberg, 2022; Morrison *et al.*, 2024; Bane *et al.*, 2024; Charter *et al.*, 2018; Heston, 2021; Brainer, 2021). Parenthood is also limited by cisnormative norms and imaginatively transformed through alternative identities and modes of caregiving for trans men and gender diverse individuals who carry pregnancies (Bane *et al.*, 2024; Charter *et al.*, 2018; Hoffkling *et al.*, 2017; Boffi *et al.*, 2024; Light *et al.*, 2014). The experiences suggest that parenthood – or “motherhood” – is not a scripted identity for the heteronormative family, but a lived experience of care, emotional labor and social recognition.

In this literature, trans-nanay can be understood as a symbolic emergence of these other shifts: a transfeminine or gender-diverse figure who embodies the culturally familiar “nanay” role of sacrifice and nurturing, yet at the same time queers it. Trans-nanay challenges the assumption that only cis Women can be mothers, as well as the notions of a nuclear, heterosexual and biologically based family (Heston, 2021, Averett, 2021, Dahl & Gabb, 2020, Goldberg, 2022, Morrison *et al.*, 2024, Zhang & Chen, 2020; Gillig *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, trans-nanay is a contemporary, resilient motherhood that is based on identity, relational caring and family-oriented activities that are counter-heterosexist and counter-transgender.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The research design is a qualitative interpretive approach with a directed qualitative content analysis design to test how trans-nanay motherhood is portrayed in the sampled Filipino movies. The frameworks of gender performativity by Judith Butler and queer space theory by Aaron Betsky are sensitizing concepts for analyzing how maternal identity is practiced and negotiated in cinematic narratives. The films are read as cultural texts, which aligns with the methods of Film Studies and Queer Theory.

Research Corpora

Through purposeful criterion sampling, the study identifies three Filipino movies — *Die Beautiful* (2016), *Mamu: And a Mother Too* (2018), and *Call Me Mother* (2025) — that feature LGBTQ+ characters playing maternal roles. The data were gathered through multiple

viewings, during which related scenes, dialogue, and visuals related to caregiving, identity, and space were identified, transcribed, and stored. The selection criteria of the films are as follows: (1) the movie has to be a contemporary film in Filipino Cinema, (2) the film must center on queer or LGBTQ+ characters in its plot, particularly portraying an LGBTQ+ individual as a representation of motherhood.

Data Collection

This research used purposeful sampling to identify contemporary films in Filipino cinema that prominently feature “trans-nanay” characters and narratives of motherhood, survival, and identity. This is a non-probability method in which the researcher deliberately selects cases relevant to the research questions (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). The films will be considered the main source of data, and excerpts of important scenes, dialogues, and visual cues will be extracted and recorded. The data collection process will include multiple viewings to familiarize oneself with the films’ context and narrative, followed by the transcription of relevant passages relevant to the research questions. Observation notes will also be written to record preliminary observations of character behaviors, environments, and moods. Drawing on Queer Theory, this approach is supported by studies that view queer analysis as a critical tool for examining how power, identity, and social norms operate within cultural texts and lived experiences (Grzanka, 2019).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a hybrid deductive-inductive coding approach. The theoretical frameworks were used to help structure initial coding, stressing the caregiving practices and spatial dynamics of recognition, exclusion, and resistance. This was followed by inductive coding, during which the themes of bodily, emotional, and economic work emerged. These categories were narrowed down and cross-tabulated across films to identify patterns and variations in the construction of trans-nanay motherhood. To achieve credibility, the research involved extended interaction with the data, a systematic coding process, and the use of direct textual evidence to aid interpretations. Since the research examines publicly available movies, there were no human subjects, although the transgender identities were respectfully and critically represented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Labor and Sacrifice of the Trans-Nanay in Philippines Cinema

The results indicate that motherhood is created by trans-nanay characters not with the help of the biological connection but the result of the long-term embodied practice of care and sacrifice. This is in line with the theory of gender performativity as put forward by Judith Butler in which identity is not a natural attribute but is created with repetitive social practices. Here, motherhood comes into play as a performative accomplishment, an

accomplishment that is continually played out in the giving of care, responsibility and commitment in relationships. Instead of being based on reproductive ability, maternal identity is created by the reiteration of nurturing behavior thus disrupting essentialist conceptualizations of motherhood.

In line with this standpoint, the discussion reveals that caregiving is a kind of doing motherhood, in which trans-nanay characters prove their legitimacy by continuing with labor. Care is not only functional as pointed out by Johnson (2015), but it comprises moral and emotional work that organizes relationships. This supports the concept of motherhood as socially constructed in relation to practice. Likewise, Inton-Campbell (2022) concurs by stating that motherhood is characterized by sustained nurturing, as opposed to biological ability. Throughout the movies, these observations are echoed in the way trans-nanay characters endlessly undertake the maternal roles though they are not recognized as such.

Furthermore, care and sacrifice are not presented in one and the same form but are developed in various, though related, forms of work. They are bodily labor, focusing on physical presence and embodied care; emotional labor, focusing on emotional connections and psychological commitment; and economic labor, focusing on material provision and financial loss in the child's interest (Gruber, 2017). These forms of labor do not exist as separate categories but rather facilitate one another and help shape the conditions under which motherhood is acted upon in different contexts of marginality and survival.

Bodily Labor

Bodily labor becomes a key aspect of enacted motherhood, in which the physical presence of the trans-nanay is the primary medium through which care is performed and legitimized. In the Butlerian sense, the body is a site where gendered and maternal identities are made material through repetition. An example is the fact that Trishia claims to be a mother since she gives care, and thus, it is through the bodily practices and not anatomy that make a mother. The act of caregiving she performs re-connotes the maternal body and shifts its meaning toward embodied nurturing.

Shiry Mae: So you don't have a vagina?

Trishia: I couldn't give birth to you—someone else did. But I'm your mother because I'm the one who takes care of you.

The discussion shows a critical redefining of the maternal body. Trishia changes the definition of motherhood from a biological capacity to care to an embodied practice that defines care and sacrifice as performed activities, not hereditary. Nevertheless, this embodiment is not neutral, and there is a weight of social critique. She sacrifices herself in the sense that she persistently puts herself forward as a mother, although she is not recognized as such, by demonstrating that the labor of the body is concerned with nurturing as well as with resisting external

scrutiny. It is not just the site of nurturing, then, but the place of legitimacy that is argued and defended by the body itself.

In the same vein, the physical nature of the body work of Mamu underscores the physical nature of care-giving in the conditions of marginality. Her work as a provider involves constant physical work, which evidences the material ground of the performance of motherhood. The bodily work by Twinkle also expands this analysis, as her resilience in a condition of deprivation highlights how the body internalizes the burden of caregiving. In all of these instances, bodily labor demonstrates that motherhood is practiced through physical perseverance, in which the body is turned into an instrument of care as well as a locus of conflict.

Mamu: I know I owe you a lot, I can't make that right anymore. All I know is this— let me do this so I can say that I did something right for you.

Vincent: How about your savings?

Mamu: Don't mind it, I can still earn it.

Although the discussion emphasizes the provision of the economy, it indirectly refers to the effort made on the body. Physical labor and hardship make the possibility of giving materially possible. The cost to Mamu in making the sacrifice is thus not only financial, but also physical in the sense of the burden needed to maintain that supply. Her physical work is performed in the background— frequently unrecognized— but vital to her role as a caregiver— showing how physical work is hidden in expressions of love.

Similarly, Twinkle's bodily labor emerges in the form of suffering and survival. Her nurture is not merely emotional but it is based on the material realities of deprivation and struggle.

Twinkle: I'm just doing what any mother would do.

Mara: "But I'm his real mother.

Twinkle: Then where were you when he needed someone?

The discussion prefigures the body as both a place of torment and a place of strength. The work of Twinkle is physically and socially demanding, where one continues to care, regardless of fatigue and degradation. The cost of her sacrifice can be seen in the fact that these experiences affect her body, underscoring that bodily labor does not only entail being present but also the ability to withstand adversity. Across these three, bodily labor exemplifies the physical experience of motherhood, which necessitates negotiating care and personal costs.

Emotional Labor

In addition to physical presence, emotional labor is also vital in maintaining maternal identity. The performative aspect of relational attachment is emotional caregiving, in which motherhood is never completed, but rather repeatedly established by affective actions like reassurance,

empathy and emotional regulation. These repeated emotional acts form the identity of the mother as per the framework by Butler as they stabilize relationships in the long run.

The way emotional labor can work as a relational validation mechanism is illustrated by the reassurance Trishia gave her child. She makes her mark by confirming her position despite social uncertainty, which supports her identity as a mother by making affective commitment. This is indicative of the fact that performativity is not merely practiced by the visible acts but also by emotional continuity.

Shirly Mae: Aren't you a real mother?

Trishia: I'm your mother—you know I love you, right? I may not be a real woman right now, but I'm still your mother.

The dialogue stresses the fact that her motherhood is strengthened with the help of emotional reassurance. Her work is in her continuous confirmation of the belonging of her child and assimilating uncertainty and social stigma. The sacrifice in this case is minor and considerable, that is, the emotional safety of the child over her susceptibility. This is where emotional labor comes in as a shield that holds the relationship together.

The emotional work of Mamu, in turn, is futuristic, since the choices she makes are informed by the hopes of the health of her child. Her unrelenting attitude in the face of misconception exemplifies the role of emotional investment in driving and maintaining caregiving behaviors. The case of Twinkle also highlights the temporal aspect of emotional labor in which attachment in the long-term is where maternal legitimacy is formed. The fact that she has had years of continuity in relationships contributes to her assertion of motherhood and the idea that identity is formed through emotional continuity, and not through biological creation.

Mamu: You are the only one I've got. I want to do something right for you.

Bona: I don't wanna go to school! I want to do this Why Mamu? Do you actually listen to me? Or do you only listen to yourself?

This reflects a form of emotional investment that motivates her actions. This relational commitment is her work, and her sacrifice is seen in the way she sacrifices herself so that her child can be well. The role of emotional labor in the case of Mamu is as a driving force that makes her economic and physical labor meaningful. Motivated her to endure challenges by anchoring her work in care, responsibility, and personal sacrifice.

Twinkle most strongly embodies emotional labor, as her motherhood is built on long-term relational continuity. Her caregiving is defined by sustained presence and emotional attachment rather than biological connection.

Mara: I still gave birth to Angelo, I'm still his biological mother.

Twinkle: You only carried him for nine months, but for the past ten

years, I've been the one raising him. I know I'm not a woman, but I am a mother. I'm a mother, Mara... I'm his mother.

This statement underlines the idea of length and stability as the foundations of motherhood. Her work is deeply rooted in years of often unseen emotional investment, and her sacrifice lies in the accumulation of these efforts over time. This is not identified by biology but by the level of emotional attachment that she has developed. In all three films, the emotional labor shows that care is not just what is done, but it is what is felt, upheld, and sustained, and it is what is continuously given.

Economic Labor

Economic labor transfers the performance of motherhood to the material world, where the caregiving is articulated through provision and monetary sacrifice. This dimension emphasizes the incorporation of performativity into socio-economic conditions, as the power to do motherhood depends on access to resources and opportunities.

Barbs: You will really lose that negative attitude.

Trishia: I really want to win, that's my only dream: to be crowned a beauty queen. After that, I can die.

The attempt to gain economic mobility as shown by Trishia is an endeavor to gain an identity and permanence and this indicates how economic activities are tied with the care giving activity. The fact that Mamu is ready to sacrifice her economic security to the needs of her child shows how economic work turns into the direct manifestation of maternal affection. The lack and hardship that Twinkle has had to go through also emphasize the fact that economic hardship exacerbates the caregiving burden.

Mamu is most obviously an exercise of economic labor by direct and deliberate provision. Her nurturing is expressed in the way she is ready to spend money and to give her child more importance than herself.

Bona: Gosh, Mamu, this is a lot, and they're all pretty; you even spent money on these. Thank you, Mamu.

Mamu: It's nothing, it's just money, I can earn it again, as long as you're happy.

This statement reveals how financial resources are transformed into expressions of love. Her labor is continuous and demanding, while her sacrifice is explicit in her readiness to deplete her own resources. Economic labor, in her case, becomes both an act of care and a form of self-denial.

Twinkle also performs economic labor, but within conditions of scarcity, highlighting a different dimension of provision marked by limited resources and persistent struggle. Despite these constraints, she continues to work to meet basic needs, showing resilience in sustaining her responsibilities.

Twinkle: Have you ever begged for money just to meet his needs? Have you ever been humiliated, when someone comes to collect, and you have nothing to give?
Mara: Fine! You're the one who sacrificed everything!

This proves that economic labor cannot be characterized by financial stability but rather hard work and perseverance. Her caregiving entails her struggling to go through the financial instability yet still making sure that the needs of her child are taken into consideration. Lack of money enhances this sacrifice and demonstrates that one has to be resolute and enduring to provide under constraint. In all three cases, economic labor shows that care is material and often comes with significant personal costs. These findings are in line with the de-essentialization of motherhood by Averett (2021), who posits that queer parents create the roles of mothers by undertaking lived and embodied actions and not by biological reproduction. The lives of Trishia, Mamu, and Twinkle illustrate that motherhood is practiced through care giving, which supports its relational and socially contractedness. In general, the three characters demonstrate that bodily, emotional and economic labor are not distinct categories but overlapping aspects of care and sacrifice. All mothers cope with these labors in various ways, but they all show that motherhood is maintained with the help of constant efforts, persistence, and dedication. Their experiences indicate that trans-nanay motherhood is a multi-layered and dynamic process, which is determined by the interaction of physical presence, emotional investment, and material provision, which is continuous.

Queer Spaces and Maternal Identity of the Trans-Nanay

The attentiveness and pain that the trans-nanay characters undertake are not carried out in vacuity. Instead, such acts are influenced by cinematic and social spaces which legitimize, limit or challenge their mother identities. Based on Queer Space Theory by Aaron Betsky (1997), this section will not just see space as a physical location but rather as a site that is socially constructed in which identity, belonging and power are negotiated. The movies demonstrate that domestic space, public stage, and intimate family settings in the movies serve as spaces where trans-nanay motherhood is either accepted, marginalized, or opposed. Space in this sense takes center stage as we can see how Trishia, Mamu and Twinkle carry out the act of caring and how their legitimacy as mothers is accepted or rejected.

Identification: Labor-affirming Spaces

Trans-nanay motherhood is recognized when spaces are created wherein their care giving labor can be seen and valued. The pageant stage in *Die Beautiful* serves as a significant queer zone of Trishia as she is able to assert her identity, take control and breaks the norms of gender and beauty. In this social context, her acting is not just

aesthetic but also entrenched in self-identification and social acceptance.

Barbs: You will really lose with that negative attitude.
Trishia: I really want to win—that's my only dream: to be crowned a beauty queen. After that, I can die.

The pageant can be interpreted through the lens of a marginalized identity, which is momentarily confirmed within it, based on Betsky's (1997) framework. The presence of Trishia on stage turns the pageant, a usual site of beauty, into a queer one of self-identification. Her ambition to win is not only personal; it is also a must to gain recognition in a society that denies her legitimacy in many ways. This identity is performative, too, in that it is repeatedly made visible and definite through self-presentation, care, and perseverance.

In Mamu: And a Mother Too, there is more recognition within the domestic space. Mamu's motherhood is revealed through material provision and daily sacrifice. The home is not only meaningful in the sense that it is a family place, but also because it is her economic/emotional labor that makes it so.
Bona: Gosh, Mamu, this is a lot, and they're all pretty; you even spent money on these, Thank you, Mamu
Mamu: It's nothing, it's just money. I can earn it again, as long as you're happy

This scene reveals that Mamu's maternal identity is known through appreciation and recognition of the relationship. When the non-biological, non-heteronormative forms of care reorganize the home, the home becomes a queer space from the perspective of Queer Space Theory. Through her work, the domestic space becomes a place where motherhood is practiced rather than inherent. The scene also exemplifies Butler's concept of performativity, as Mamu's identity as a mother is created through repetition: giving, providing, and making the child happy. In *Call Me Mother*, emotional continuity is the basis of recognition of Twinkle, instead of legal or biological legitimacy. The scene of departure proves the fact that her motherly role is justified by the child being attached to her.

Twinkle: Bye!
Angelo: Mama, I want to be with you!
Mama, Mama! Mama!
Twinkle: I love you!

In this case, the recognition is evident in the child's affective claim. The emotional connection between Twinkle and Angelo creates a sense of maternal legitimacy, even though, technically, the real mother is not institutionally recognized as such. Even a moment of separation is a space of recognition, in queer spatial terms, as the child's public attachment to Twinkle confirms Twinkle's role as caregiver. This implies that the legal status or biology does not legitimize trans-nanay motherhood but the intimacy

that is experienced through caring.

Exclusion: Spaces That Contest Labor

Whereas there are spaces that validate trans-nanay motherhood, there are also spaces that challenge it with their ideas of normativity of gender, family, and legitimacy. Exclusion is the denial of labor of care or re-packaging it as an illegitimate labor. In these movies, the exclusion is not merely an interpersonal, but also a spatial phenomenon, as it occurs in homes and family contexts, which is traditionally linked to a sense of belonging. In the case of Trishia, family home turns into a place of non-acceptance and not acceptance. The domestic space imposes normative gender ideals by misrecognizing and deadnaming her instead of recognizing her identity.

Papa: Don't ever come back! Stick that in your bead, Patrick!
Trishia: I'm Trisha. My name is Trishia Echevarria, from the Bahamas.

This dialogue depicts the home as an identity-denying place. The fact that Trishia is addressed by her deadname symbolically removes the identity that she had chosen and strengthens the patriarchal control in the family. This scene explains how space can be used to control belonging by deciding which identities are accepted and which are denied through the theory presented by Betsky (1997). Meanwhile, the fact that Trishia corrects her name is a performative act of rebellion that states that she cannot completely regulate her identity within the space that excludes her.

Likewise, the exclusion of Mamu is experienced in the domestic domain, where her caregiving is not acknowledged due to the stigmatization of her work and identity. Her work keeps the home afloat, but it is taken up with a grain of salt instead of appreciation.

Mamu: I just wanted to be a mother to you.
Bona: A mother to me? Or did you just want a helper around the house? You and Mom are the same; you both don't know how to love.

In this scene, the home is a judgmental place where the maternal labor of Mamu is put into doubt. Her care is restructured as selfishness or convenience, taking away the emotional and material sacrifices of the care. The Queer Space Theory can be used to explain why domestic space can be intimate and exclusionary: it can seem a place of family, but it can also be a place of reproduction of judgment and stigma and conditional acceptance. The absence of care that makes Mamu unacceptable as a mother is thus not the reason, but the fact that her identity and work do not conform to the dominant norms of motherly respectability.

The marginalization of Twinkle is less apparent, yet it is equally important. It manifests itself in the daily engagements and privileges biological affiliation and silently establishes her as an outsider to shared space.

Angelo: I don't want shrimp, ma.
Mara: Me too, I'm allergic to scent
Twinkle: I'm also allergic to scent

This scene demonstrates how exclusion can take place without being expelled physically. Though Twinkle is in the same location, biological familiarity establishes an unseen barrier between her and Mara and Angelo. The scene indicates that domestic belonging is fashioned by more than just presence, but biological continuity, supposedly as well. Betsky, through his lens, makes the common space unequal: he incorporates Twinkle in her physical form but leaves her out in her symbolic form. Her emotional work exists, but the space gives her a silent reminder that biological motherhood is still privy to social privileges.

Resistance: Reclaiming Spaces Through Labor

Even though excluded, the trans-nanay characters do not cede by still practicing care in areas that strive to marginalize them. Their stand does not always involve drama; in many instances, it manifests itself by persistence, nurturing, self-naming, and unwillingness to give up motherly care. This echoes the concept of Butler that identity is constituted through repetitive practices, and also expands upon the articulation of Butler that space is subject to change through embodied practice. The resistance of Trishia is performative, as she is reclaiming identity by speaking, being there, and doing things again and again. Her maternal legitimacy is challenged, but she does not back off; instead, she claims her position.

Shirly Mae: Aren't you a real mother?
Trishia: I may not be a real woman right now, but I'm still your mother.

This quote is a direct challenge to the biological and gendered beliefs that are attributed to motherhood. The assertion of Trishia makes the domestic space of self-location. Her claim indicates that motherhood is not anchored in the anatomy but in recurrent practices of care, protection, and emotional accountability. In this regard, her opposition is in her still practicing motherhood despite the doubts in her identity.

The opposition of Mamu is not so vocal, yet it is also effective. It manifests itself in survival, perseverance, and further supply, even in the face of social stigma. The fact that she is able to carry on caring even in harsh circumstances makes marginal space a space of endurance.

Foreigner: Here, all yours. For your kids' recovery. What is your name again?
Mamu: Erna, Ernaly for short.

This dialogue demonstrates that recognition is scarce and short-lived, as Mamu is recognized more in the context of necessity and survival. But her reply is an agency as

well. She momentarily asserts personhood by identifying herself in a realm in which she is otherwise degraded either by poverty, work, or dependency. Her opposition is never aggressive but constant: she repossessed space by being there, working, and caring. This demonstrates that even survival as such is a queer spatial practice in that it challenges the structures that render her identity and motherhood contingent. Twinkle is more rebellious and challenging. She is not afraid to defy the belief that biological motherhood is better than caregiving motherhood.

Twinkle: How did you ever become a mother? Have you endured everything for him? Have you felt that pain? Do you worry every time he's far from you? You don't know the fear that grips me whenever he feels even the slightest pain."

This fight enables Twinkle to regain power in the domestic arena. Naming her sacrifices, she brings to light the work that has been shunned or downplayed. Her opposition is in her imposing on the space the emotional and bodily prices of her motherhood. In this act, Twinkle reinvented the concept of maternal legitimacy to be earned over time through taking care of one, as opposed to being ensured by birth. Her speech turns the home into a place of judgment, a place of assertion and counter-claim.

The findings indicate that the trans-nanay motherhood within the Filipino cinema is negotiated in an ongoing process of recognition, exclusion, and resistance using the socially constructed space that defines the validation or denial of the maternal identity. Scheim *et al.* (2025) suggest that transgender recognition is a dynamic construction of the social and institutional, which requires participation in the normative spaces, that is why belonging to trans-nanay figures is not a matter-of-course but a struggle in the process of interaction with dominant social structures. These lessons, when combined, demonstrate that motherhood is not merely a responsibility of care and sacrifice, but also an issue of space and social legitimacy in which their labor, sacrifice, and presence challenge the normal conceptualizations of identity. The embodied negotiations they embody, in fact, not only occupy domestic and social spaces but also reform them as they create forms of motherhood that remain in use despite the exclusion and redefinition.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper concludes that trans-nanay motherhood, as a phenomenon in the chosen Filipino films, emerges not by means of biology but by means of the ongoing process of care, sacrifice, and spatial negotiation. The role of Trishia, Mamu, and Twinkle illustrates that motherhood is done by bodily, emotional, and economic work, with maternal identity being a lived and relational practice as opposed to a biological status. Their experiences demonstrate that caregiving can be viewed as a potent foundation of redefining the traditional Filipino ideal of the *ilaw ng tahanan* as a heteronormative image of

womanhood and as a larger being of a strong woman who survives and loves. Another finding of the study is that spaces play a big role in the recognition, rejection, or reclaiming of trans-nanay motherhood. The arenas over and over again where maternal legitimacy is negotiated are home, political arenas and warm family environments. These spaces are not neutral spaces but dynamic spaces that determine belonging and nonbelonging by Queer Space Theory. In the meantime, the repetitiveness of the caregiving activities performed by the trans-nanay characters is a sign of gender performativity, which shows that motherhood is created through action, presence, and commitment. As a rule, the trans-nanay in the movies is an agent of happiness and survival whose motherhood challenges the mainstream ideas of family, gender, and belonging in Philippine cinema.

Implication

These findings indicate that motherhood is less of a biologically, gender-based, and legally defined role and more of a relational and performative role. The work is applicable to Gender Studies and Queer Theory in the sense that it contributes to the discussion of how transgender identities are altering traditional family structures and changing the definition of care. The critical place in the analysis of the film studies demonstrates that the Filipino cinema can be a critical space to ask questions to heteronormative ideals and unveil marginalized modes of motherhood. The study has cultural implications also. By portraying trans-nanay characters as nurturers, providers and emotional anchors, the movies give alternative interpretations of the narrow perception of the concept of the *ilaw ng tahanan* as a phenomenon that is inherently cisgender feminine. This means that we need to be much more conceptualized of Filipino family life whereby the legitimacy of the mother is based on love, responsibility and future care instead of biological motherhood. Educators and researchers can apply the findings to participate in the debate about gender representation, queer families, and inclusive media literacy in the academic setting.

Recommendations

Future scholars can contribute to this research by analyzing additional Filipino movies, television shows, or online stories depicting transgender parents or queer families. The bigger sample can help to understand whether the trends identified during this study can be observed in other types of media. It can also be compared to other Southeast Asian cinemas to study the development of the portrayal of transgender motherhood in relation to the culture of the Philippines. Filmmakers and media producers are urged to develop more sophisticated portrayals of trans-nanay characters other than victims, stigmatized, or comedic relief. Their agency, happiness, complexity, and daily types of care should be emphasized in future portrayals. The study of queer motherhood in Philippine media should also be enhanced by academic

researchers through intersectionality approaches that take into consideration classes, labor, religion, family formation, and regional identity. Lastly, teachers can employ movies with trans-nanay characters as critical texts to achieve gender sensitivity, empathy, and non-discriminatory interpretations of family and motherhood.

REFERENCES

- Allen, S., & Mendez, S. (2018). Hegemonic heteronormativity: Toward a new era of queer family theory. *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 10, 70-86. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12241>
- Averett, K. H. (2021). Queer parents, gendered embodiment and the de-essentialisation of motherhood. *Feminist Theory*, 22(2), 284–304. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700121989226>
- Bane, S. S., Obedin-Maliver, J., Ragosta, S., Hastings, J., Lunn, M. R., Flentje, A., Capriotti, M. R., Lubensky, M. E., Tordoff, D. M., & Moseson, H. (2024). Pathways to parenthood among transgender men and gender diverse people assigned female or intersex at birth in the United States: analysis of a Cross-Sectional 2019 Survey. *AJOG Global Reports*, 4(3), 100381. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.xagr.2024.100381>
- Bane, S., Obedin-Maliver, J., Ragosta, S., Hastings, J., Lunn, M., Flentje, A., Capriotti, M., Lubensky, M., Tordoff, D., & Moseson, H. (2024). Pathways to parenthood among transgender men and gender diverse people assigned female or intersex at birth in the United States: analysis of a Cross-Sectional 2019 Survey. *AJOG Global Reports*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.xagr.2024.100381>
- Betsky, A. (1997). Queer space: Architecture and same-sex desire. *New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.*
- Boffi, L., De Souza, C., De Oliveira-Cardoso, É., & Santos, M. (2024). Pathways to parenthood experience among transgender men: A systematic review and meta-synthesis. *Trends in Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-023-00355-y>
- Bower-Brown, S. (2022). Beyond Mum and Dad: Gendered Assumptions about Parenting and the Experiences of Trans and/or Non-Binary Parents in the UK. *LGBTQ+ Family an Interdisciplinary Journal*, 18(3), 223–240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/27703371.2022.2083040>
- Brainer, A. (2021). Lesbian and Gay Parents, Heterosexual Kinship, and Queer Dreams: Making Families in Twenty-First Century Taiwan. *positions: asia critique*, 29, 633 - 656. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-8978386>
- Charter, R., Ussher, J. M., Perz, J., & Robinson, K. (2018). The transgender parent: Experiences and constructions of pregnancy and parenthood for transgender men in Australia. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 19(1), 64–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2017.1399496>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Cambridge: SAGE Publications.
- Dantas, D. D. S., De Leão Lima Almeida, G. P., De Oliveira Ferreira, B., Therense, M., & Neves, A. L. M. D. (2024). Meanings and perceptions of parenthood among transgender men who became pregnant before gender transition. *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva*, 29(4), e19532023. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1413-81232024294.19532023>
- Dahl, U., & Gabb, J. (2020). *Trends in Contemporary Queer Kinship and Family Research*. , 24, 209-237. <https://doi.org/10.34041/ln.v24.586>
- Falck, F., Frisé, L., Dhejne, C., & Armand, G. (2020). Undergoing pregnancy and childbirth as trans masculine in Sweden: experiencing and dealing with structural discrimination, gender norms and microaggressions in antenatal care, delivery and gender clinics. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 22(1–2), 42–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2020.1845905>
- Gillig, T., Macary, J., & Gross, L. (2022). Explain, label, or ignore? Exploring LGBTQ-parent families' communication about family identity. *Communication Studies*, 73, 314 - 330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2022.2064532>
- Goldberg, A. E. (2022). LGBTQ-parent families: Diversity, intersectionality, and social context. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 49, 101517. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101517>
- Gruber, J. (2017). Delivering public health insurance through private plan choice in the United States. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(4), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.4.3>
- Grzanka, P. R., Gonzalez, K. A., & Spanierman, L. B. (2019). White Supremacy and Counseling Psychology: A Critical–Conceptual Framework. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 47(4), 478–529. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000019880843>
- Halberstam, J. (2018). *Trans: A quick and quirky account of gender variability*. Cambridge: University of California Press.
- Heston, L. (2021). QUEERING KINSHIP: LGBTQ PARENTS AND THE CREATION OF REAL UTOPIAS. **.
- Hoffkling, A., Obedin-Maliver, J., & Sevelius, J. (2017). From erasure to opportunity: a qualitative study of the experiences of transgender men around pregnancy and recommendations for providers. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-017-1491-5>
- Inton-Campbell, M. (2022b). Precarity and motherhood in Philippine trans cinema. *Akda the Asian Journal of Literature Culture Performance*, 1(3), 44–52. <https://doi.org/10.59588/2782-8875.1023>
- Johnson, E. K. (2015). The business of care: the moral labour of care workers. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 37(1), 112–126. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12184>
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom,

- J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2013). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
- Morrison, R., Cirineu, C., Lagos-Cerón, D., & Cantero-Garlito, P. (2024). LGBTQ+ parenting: An interpretative review of Latin American literature from an occupational science perspective. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 32, 201 - 218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2024.2415292>
- Riggs, D. W., Rosenberg, S., & Navarro, D. J. (2022). Attitudes towards parents of trans children and their rights: an Australian study. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 20(1), 198–207. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-022-00737-4>
- Schein, A. I., Restar, A. J., Zubizarreta, D., Lucas, R., Cole, S. W., Everhart, A., Baker, K. E., & Rodriguez, M. I. (2025). Legal gender recognition and the health of transgender and gender diverse people: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Social Science & Medicine*, 378, 118147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2025.118147>
- Shrivastwa, B. K. (2022). A study of feminine ties in Walker's *The Color Purple*. *American Journal of Interdisciplinary Research and Innovation*, 1(3), 40–46. <https://doi.org/10.54536/ajiri.v1i3.691>
- Thomson, K. (n.d.-b). An analysis of LGBTQ+ representation in television and film. *Scholars Commons @ Laurier*. https://scholars.wlu.ca/bridges_contemporary_connections/vol5/iss1/7
- Von Doussa, H., Power, J., & Riggs, D. (2015). Imagining parenthood: the possibilities and experiences of parenthood among transgender people. *Culture Health & Sexuality*, 17(9), 1119–1131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2015.1042919>
- Zhang, D., & Chen, Y. (2020). “We are the Unusual Factor”: Queering Family Communication Norms with Gay Adoptive Parents. *Journal of Family Communication*, 20, 206 - 220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2020.1767621>