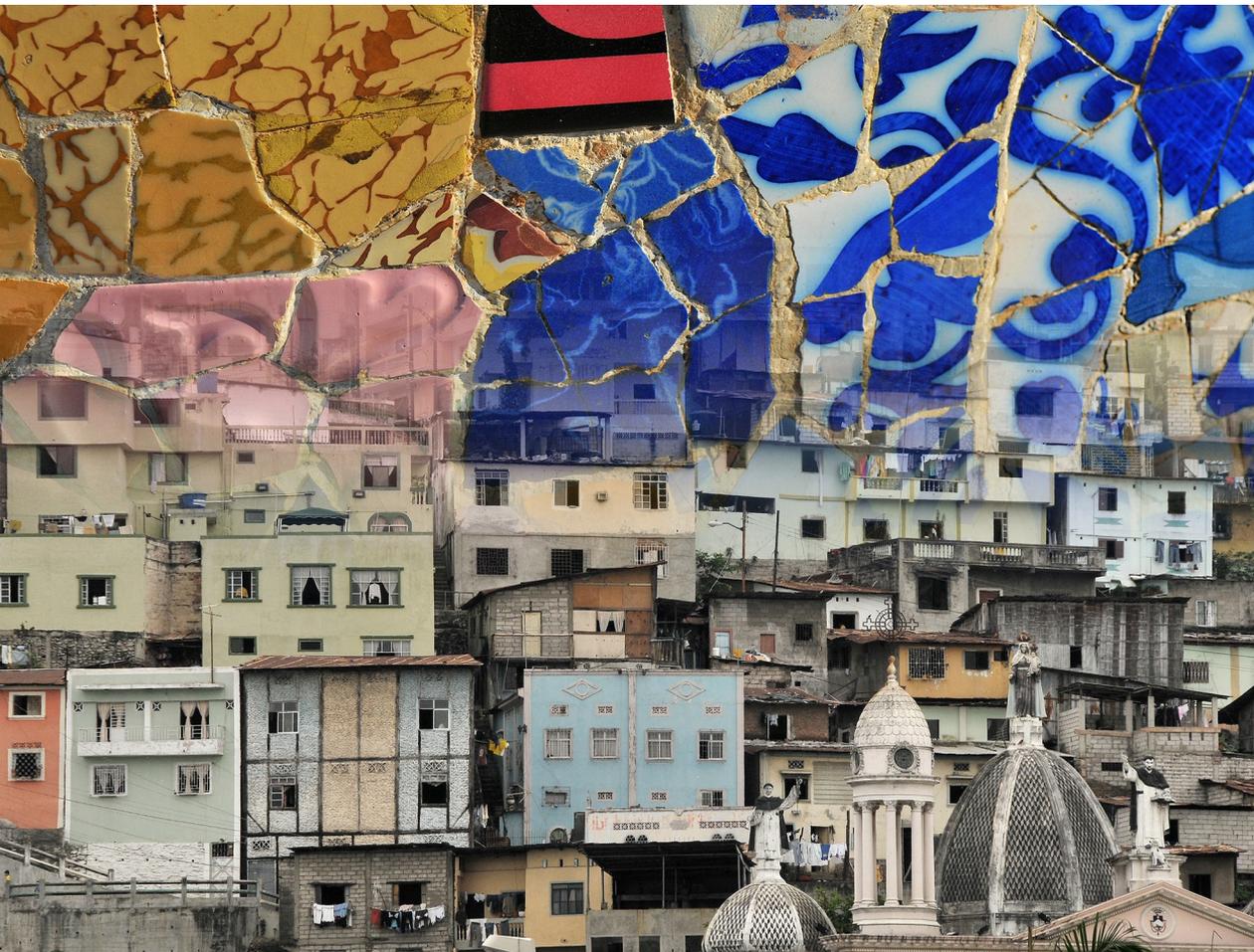


Mobilising care

Ecuadorian families and transnational lives between Ecuador and Spain

Gladis Aguirre Vidal



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Academic dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology at Stockholm University to be publicly defended on Friday 25 October 2019 at 10.00 in Ahlmannsalen, Geovetenskapens hus, Svante Arrhenius väg 12.

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the dynamics of care in the transnational lives of Ecuadorian migrant women in Spain. It is concerned with the various forms of care that take shape and are sustained in the workplace, between friends, and among family members in Ecuador and Spain. Ultimately, it sheds light on how care is mobilised to sustain ideals of solidarity at work as well as togetherness in transnational life. The thesis is set against the background of the economic and political crisis in Ecuador of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which resulted not only in the dollarization of the economy and the removal of the country's president, but in a dramatic shift of traditional male migration from the southern highlands to the United States, to a new wave of largely middle class female migration to Western Europe, especially Spain. Women from across the country left their children, spouses and elderly parents behind to work in domestic and care jobs abroad. In Ecuador, this disturbed the dominant cultural imaginary of the co-habiting and united family, centred on the presence of the woman as mother and wife. In light of this, the thesis engages with women's dilemmas in giving and receiving care during years of absence, the role of family members, friends and domestic workers in this process, and the development of long-term goals focused on remittances, reunification, return, and the ultimate goal of creating a better future. Most generally, while challenging a series of dichotomies between love and money, home and work, gift and commodity—which have structured academic discussions concerning the feminization of international migration—the thesis describes the intimate relationship between women's participation in the gift economy and a global labour market through the lens of care relationships.

Keywords: *care, migration, transnationalism, moral practice, women, kinship, family, labour, Ecuador, Spain.*

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To my mother
Josefina Vidal †

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Map of Ecuador



Map of Spain



Map graphics downloaded from www.googlemaps.com

Map of Ecuador: Map data @2019 Google

Map of Spain: Map data @2019 Inst Geogr. National, Google, GeoBasis-DE/BKG (@2009)

Mapa GIsrael ORION-ME

CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCTION

Migration and care

'Mi hijo vive allá, está enfermo' (My son lives there [in Ecuador], he's sick), Aracely explains to me, interrupting her conversation with her friend Grace at a cafeteria in downtown Barcelona. I have been invited to join them for breakfast (*esmorco*¹): café au lait, croissants, and *magdalenas* (muffins). Aracely shares a nearby apartment with her son, daughter-in-law, two grandchildren, and a young daughter. Except for the two grandchildren, all of them, as well as a sister who frequently visits, accompanied us that morning. Aracely and I had previously agreed on the phone that we would have a long interview on this day. Instead, I found myself involved in her daily breakfast ritual. 'I work the whole night; should I stay in the kitchen the whole day after that?' she asks rhetorically.

She updates me so that I can follow their conversation: 'I brought my two children to Spain very soon after I came here, 12 years ago. Only the youngest is left in Ecuador with my parents. He refused to move here. He doesn't like to even hear about it. He studies in Guayaquil to be a . . . [she hesitates, looking for help from her oldest son]. What does he study?' Aracely asks. '*Director técnico de fútbol*' (football coach), the son answers from the other corner of the table. 'But just now it's difficult', Aracely continues. 'He has hepatitis'. She turns back to Grace and continues their conversation about how much money will be needed to go to Ecuador. 'I need 5000 US dollars', Aracely states. Grace responds: 'Take only 3000. That's enough, you don't have to invite everybody to restaurants, you can go to the market and fill the fridge. There's always someone who will help with cooking. You have to remember, your son is sick, you can't do anything, you will only be there for a few days'. Grace, sounding

¹ In Barcelona *esmorco* is not exactly breakfast but some coffee with a *bocadillo*, or some bread or muffins at around 10 o'clock.

rational, tries to help Aracely save money and decide if it is worth taking this expensive trip instead of remitting a significant amount to the family.

Visit or send money? If sending, how much is the equivalent for practical needs and the love that one wishes to show, and to keep a place in the hearts of those who remain at home? How much is too much? These questions involve distress and represent common dilemmas for a long-distance mother: the more she sends, the less the possibility to visit. The more she sends, the better the conditions that can be created at home. Aracely's son's recovery will take another three months, but she can get only four weeks of holiday in August, when the flights are most expensive. Aracely doesn't care about the high prices and responds to Grace's arguments: 'Yeah, I know, but I want to be there, to attend to him of course' (*para atenderlo pues*).

The word *atenderlo*, to attend to him, which Aracely uses to describe her desired relationship to her son in Ecuador, means being responsible, showing her love as a mother through physical presence and support, talking to him, giving him *una agüita* (a cup of tea), *hacerle la comida* (cooking for him), and accompanying him to the doctor. Aracely underlines the word *atenderlo* by adding *pues* (of course) indicating that it was self-evident for her, as a mother, to be there, no matter the distance between them. She firmly believes that attending is something to be done 'in presence' but her situation obliges her to rethink, to calculate, to decide the most proper way of caring for a member of her family who remains in the home country. Aracely's worries show her desire to overcome geographical distance, synchronising a possible visit with how her life is organised in Barcelona. Aracely's description is also related to the questions of money and love. Money is not only for travel or to treat the ill son but also something extra for the rest of the family and relatives: a grandmother who remained beside her son, a grandfather who accompanied them, perhaps two or three cousins who 'might be available to help in the kitchen'. *Atenderlo* could not be reduced to attending to just the sick son; rather, it included a world of family and social life.

It is in Aracely's worries 'to attend to', *atender*, that I found the connection between migration and care, *el cuidado*, that I initially describe here as a set of practices that mixes with a world of emotions to create well-being and social affective bonds. It is what women in the following chapters often do, at home with their families and at work. Being at a distance, however, migrant mothers cannot attend to

their beloved ones as they desire without the support of daughters, mothers and others, who remain in the home country performing the daily tasks for the family (*por la familia*). They do not migrate but still experience transnational life on a daily basis. This study revolves around the shared commitments of care that sustain family and social life when women have migrated, but try to be present ‘here’ and ‘there’ through their experiences of a ‘double life’, *la doble vida*.

The concept *atender* introduces us to the central theme of this study on transnational families, based on fieldwork over extended periods in Barcelona and Ecuador in 2007-2008, shorter visits in 2009, 2010 and 2011, and follow-up discussions with respondents by phone, email, and social media in more recent years. The study follows primarily women, but also men and children, and their various ways of speaking, thinking, feeling and acting in regard to care, through a process in which they re-accommodate their routines and ideals in order to sustain the fragile balance of transnational life. In its most simple description, care entails the concrete act of emotional and physical attentiveness, but has also increasingly become a commodity, as in the care work of the migrants themselves. The study sheds light on the daily practices of giving and receiving care, and the affect and social life that is activated in this process. Critical to sustaining this dynamic are people’s deep commitments of support (*compromisos*), permanent attentiveness (*atenciones*), and portraits of sacrifices (*sacrificios*) that sustain family cohesion and well-being. We will see throughout the chapters the mundane activities of care: cleaning, cooking and serving food, sending children to school, taking the elderly and sick to the doctor. These activities take place as individuals happen to be there where there is a need, beside a loved one or in the undefined terrains of work and home, as both paid and unpaid care. We will also learn about the desires and hopes for a better future for family members—through the building of a house or children’s education—which animates migration as a long-term project. More specifically, this is a study of the care that underpins these hopes: its practices and moralities regarding relations of intimacy and economic exchange. The study explores how care and migration shape each other, and begins with the question, Who cares when a woman migrates? I argue that taking this question seriously creates an empirical space that will allow for us to understand how transnational migration takes shape through diverse forms of social and economic relationships that cannot be reduced to the forces of global inequality. Before this can be clarified, however, I begin with

an overview of the various discussions in the literature about the concept of care.

Reviewing care

While agreeing that care is an essential part of human life, scholars point out the difficulties of defining the concept. Care includes practice, affect and ambivalence. It can be an oppressive burden, a joy, or boredom. The widely-quoted definition of care proposed by Fischer and Tronto provides a useful starting point: ‘everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible’ (quoted in Tronto 2017:31). That world, the authors claim, ‘includes our bodies, our selves, our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex life-sustaining web’ (Tronto *ibid.*, see also Puig de la Bellacasa 2017).²

In contrast to the attention given to themes such as love and freedom in the Western philosophical tradition, care has not been given priority since it has largely been considered a domestic emotional issue (Reich 1995, Nguyen, Zavoretti, Tronto 2017). This has changed in the last four decades as feminist scholars have increasingly developed an ethics of care in psychology (Gilligan 1982), political theory (Tronto 1987, 1993), and philosophy (Held 2005). From an earlier focus on women, gender, and morality (Gilligan 1982), debates have advanced toward developing a theory of care, and proposals for a new kind of society, ‘a caring democracy’ (Tronto 1987, 2013, 2017, Held 1995, 2005). The ethics of care starts from the concept that all human beings need and receive care and give care to others, and that humans are always interdependent and vulnerable beings. In feminist discussions of the late twentieth century about social reproduction and gender inequality, tensions between independence and dependency constituted a key focus. If all individuals become autonomous, then who will care? Tronto points out that while care is asymmetrical, democracy proposes the pursuit of equality (see Tronto 2013, also Tronto online conference 2009). How

² Fischer and Tronto propose five phases of care: caring about (identify needs), caring for (accept responsibility), caring or caregiving (the actual work of caring), care receiving (reception of care and evaluating effectiveness). Tronto added one, ‘caring with’ (Tronto 2017, see also Tronto, interview online 2009).

can we combine both to advance a discussion of ‘the good life’? As stated by Tronto, in pursuing ‘a caring democracy’ it becomes necessary to challenge the ideal of the rational, self-interested individual, which in turn obliges us to rethink all aspects of human life, ontology, epistemology, ethics and politics (2017).

The ethics of care has formed the basis for an expanding literature in fields such as medicine, grassroots activism, farming, science, knowledge and technology, and—most relevant for this study—the fields of migration, labour and anthropology (for a review, see Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, see also Mol et al. 2010). Regarding migration, the ‘global care chains’ literature in the late 1990s called attention to the political economies of care connecting rich and poor countries through female migrant domestic care workers (Hochschild 2000).³ Regarding the anthropology and sociology of labour, important contributions concern the notions of emotional and intimate labour (Hochschild 2003 [1983], Constable 2009, Parreñas and Boris 2010).⁴ More recently, in anthropology care has been scrutinized in discussions of neoliberalism and subject formation in the face of downgrading welfare states and different forms of dispossession, debt, and limited resources (Garcia 2010, Han 2012, Livingston 2012).

More generally, approaching human beings via the ethics of care, as interdependent, vulnerable, and as at once givers and receivers of care—in daily life and throughout the life-cycle—illuminates the centrality of care to anthropology. Thus, the mundane topics of family and domesticity, and the entanglement of emotions and material things are integral to how societies organise their reproduction. As Borneman

³ More generally, analyses of care work (paid and unpaid) have developed from different perspectives: one strand observes that care work is devalued because it tends to be done by women and women of colour; a second takes care as the ‘public good’ that benefits whole societies beyond the direct recipients of care; a third sees care workers as ‘prisoners of love’ due to altruistic caring motives in relation to employers who can easily pay less; a fourth focuses on the commodification of emotions, and a fifth outlines critical approaches to the tensions between love and money (see a review in England 2005).

⁴ Intimacy refers to the affect, closeness and well-being that construct long-lasting relations. I sometimes use the term as a synonym of care. I do not, however, leave out of focus that most intimate relations simultaneously involve conflict, control, disappointment and frustration. As Zelizer observes, intimacy does not exclude anger, despair or shame, seen for instance in abusive sexual relations (2005:17). When talking about intimacy and intimate relations it is also useful to refer to the definition that Constable provides: ‘intimate relations refers here to social relationships that are—or give the impression of being—physically and/or emotionally close, personal, sexually intimate, private, caring, or loving. Such relationships are not necessarily associated with or limited to the domestic sphere, but discourses about intimacy are often intertwined with ideas about gender and domesticity, gifts as opposed to markets’ (Constable 2009:50).

puts it, ‘the need to care and be cared for’ is ‘an elementary principle of human affiliation’ (2001:37), and ‘prior to any family or group’ (2001:36), which means that care should bring scholars to think beyond established categories of analysis such as gender and kinship (2001).

Furthermore, daily practices of care put into question a predominant idea that the economic sphere should be perceived as separated from social life and moral issues (cf. Mauss 1990 [1950], Polanyi 1944, Graeber 2014, 2014 [2011]). For this study, this provides the possibility to analyse the contemporary relevance of family and family relationships, and how families and processes of economic globalization shape each other, exploring how relations of care intersect with regimes of migration. Keeping in mind Puig de la Bellacasa’s words, that care needs ‘to be constantly reclaimed from idealized meanings’ (2017), these pages remind us that a discussion of care and female migration can hardly be separated from family issues, since they become central to how care is (de)valued, idealised, neglected, or practiced in global times, especially for human beings trying to stay connected.

From global care chains to the mobility of care

Taking care as a starting point allows us to understand how transnational migration is being reconfigured in the context of global inequality and through different forms of mutual support. To understand this dynamic this study pays attention to the materiality of care and its capacity to travel, produce and transform social life among Ecuadorians working in Barcelona as well as their families who remain behind. In this process, care binds people together across great distances. As Yates-Doerr (2014 n.p.) highlights in her search for alternative ways of situating care, ‘ethnography hopes to figure care as expansion, the pursuit of connections’. In this expansion and movement, a world of inequalities and asymmetries must be overcome or adjusted to. When neither markets nor governments satisfy basic welfare needs, the mobilization of care often becomes the only way to make ends meet, and to allow for social and cultural reproduction, more generally. This becomes particularly evident when considering

the feminisation of migration, and more specifically, Ecuadorian women migrating to engage in domestic care labour in Spain. The Spanish labour market embraces—or rather resists abandoning—the family form, so-called ‘familialism’ observed concretely in the predominance of grandmothers’ care and families in general as fundamental resources for people’s care (see Naldini 2003, León 2010, Tobio 2012a, 2012b).

Care has been a central topic in the literature on transnational families, families that Bryceson and Vuorella (2002:3) have defined as people who attempt to retain ‘a feeling of collective welfare and unity’ while geographically separated. As noted, the starting point for this literature was in the analysis of ‘global care chains’, largely based on the labour of migrant mothers (Hochschild 2002), which in turn was built on Parreñas’ study of the international division of reproductive labour (2001).⁵ The global care chain model understands care as a commodity that is extracted from one country to another, creating a ‘care deficit’ in the former and a ‘care surplus’ in the latter, and global inequality, more generally.

The care chain model places nuclear families and the mother-child link at the analytical centre of the scene of global migration. This emphasis has produced important studies about absent mothers and the consequences of migration suffered by their children, arguing that children benefit from remittances only at high emotional costs (Parreñas 2001, 2005, Schmalzbauer 2004, Dreby 2007). In recent years, however, researchers have voiced scepticism toward the assumed negative effects of absent mothers and the oversimplification of long-distance caring (see, for instance, Madianou and Miller 2011, Zentgraaf and Chinchilla 2012, Boccagni 2012, Baldassar 2016). The influential work of Parreñas (2001) about Filipino migrant women has been criticised for missing the meanings and diversity of family

⁵ According to Hochschild (2002), there is an implied ‘deficit of care’ when women become incorporated into the labour market, when governments do not provide care for children and elderly, and when men do not participate enough in care tasks at home. In rich countries, the theory explains, the void of care is filled by migrant women who come from poor countries. They are paid low wages, as care is a devalued commodity in the labour market. Simultaneously, the care gap produced in the migrant women’s home countries is filled by poorer women or relatives who are generally paid with remittances or gifts. Moreover, Hochschild (2002) says, those who lose most in this global game are the children in poor countries who suffer from abandonment, loneliness, school drop-out, and poor health care when their mothers leave, while their grandmothers—the most common alternative caregivers—also have to work.

relations in countries of origin; for example, the significance of siblingship (Aguilar 2013, for further critiques, see for instance, Yarris n.d., Leinaweaver 2010). In a similar vein, in the context of Nicaraguan migration and grandmothers' caregiving, Yarris (2017) describes care as 'a moral and practical engagement with global migration', while the idea of 'care circulation' is an explicit response to static ideas of the global care chain, based on the notion that care moves in multiple and asymmetrical directions, thus overcoming dichotomies of global-local and deficit-surplus (Baldassar and Merla 2014). More recently, the 'ambivalent terrains of care and control' (Johnson and Lindquist 2019) provides advances in analyses of caring relations beyond the global-local duality of the 'global care chains' and notions of the 'care circulation'; that is, a focus on asymmetrical and reciprocal exchanges of care in transnational families.

More specifically, in the global care chain literature, care provided by other family members in the home country was named but overlooked; the basic understanding was that individuals assume care and caring in similar ways everywhere, without social and cultural particularities. In contrast, this study places the idea of 'care deficit' into focus by shedding light on the complexities of caring relations as a constant movement between different sites. Moreover, this study does not take for granted prior categories such as 'family' and 'deficit', but searches for these and other concepts among the voices of the research respondents.

Although Ecuadorian women who leave behind obligations of care also become part of global care chains, I explicitly attempt to move beyond this perspective in a number of ways, building on other work. First, this study does not exclusively trace the movements of migrants but focuses on the coordinated efforts and vivid relations with those who remain behind, thus recognising local variations of family organisation and relationships that do not focus solely on mother-child bonds but include others such as grandmothers, fathers and siblings (Aguilar 2013). Second, it recognises that care rather than people are on the move, and that this movement is reversible. Care is not a 'natural capacity' attached to one person, but rather the resource through which people construct social relations, meaning, and life. People's movements are limited by migration policies and social hierarchies, or by their own lack of skills and material resources. Yet, the continuity of commitments and performances of care do not depend exclusively on the geographical displacement of people but on their moral affective engagements and on the constant recreation of

social networks, processes by which families bring themselves ‘together across distance’ (Baldassar and Merla 2014:40), or sustain a ‘sense of closeness and emotional connection’ (González-Fernández 2018) despite separation and absence. As such, the mobility of care should be understood as a ‘moral endeavour’ and a ‘social dynamic’ (Livingston 2012). This illustrates a new form of analysis that incorporates an extended network of family members, relatives, and friends and applying a more dynamic notion of care embedded in particular cultural circumstances and structures of power.

In this context, the anthropological turn to kinship as a social process (Schneider 1984, Carsten 2000, 2004) has influenced studies of transnational families and care dynamics (Olwig 2007, Eastmond and Åkesson 2007, Leinaweaver 2010). The new theories of kinship use the term ‘relatedness’ to indicate that kinship is dynamic and creative; ‘being related’ comes into being in everyday practices such as small acts of hospitality and feeding (Carsten 2000, 2004). Borneman (2001) also suggests that care precedes family bonds (see also Leinaweaver 2015). Practices of care come to create, confirm and expand intimacy, affect, and social relations in general, both in relation to non-kin and ‘across generations’ (Yarris 2017). Following this, Leinaweaver emphasises the ‘care slot’ arising in situations of transnational migration, as migrant women leave behind a vacuum not only in the lives of children, but also of elderly parents (Leinaweaver 2010). Alber and Drotbohm (2015:2) suggest that ‘care practices are needed to contribute to the making and maintaining of kinship’, while Weismantel argues that caring activities such as nurturing, feeding, or spending time under the same roof constitute kinship (1995). Kinship is thus lived and created through practices of care, or as Borneman puts it: ‘. . . lurking behind and prior to either families or groups are relations of care’ (2001:36).

Recognising that families are ongoing processes, this study thus deals with what I call the ‘mobility of care’, which is the basic condition that allows people to construct and reconstruct societies and family relations across great distances—relations that are not the natural product of having been born into a defined group, but maintained through an intensive process of social, economic and emotional investments. The mobility of care suggests that care needs to be reconceptualised as multi-directional and dynamic, binding (or separating) people together across time and space. As Huang et al. have put it: ‘Care does not only flow one way, the flows of care are bilateral and reciprocal’ (2012:132). This reminds us that people can

be givers and receivers of care at once, along life cycles, regardless of social or geographical position.

In particular, this study follows the shared care and the struggles and creativity of women and families to coordinate their efforts and balance their ways of showing love and care in different forms that we do not generally define as care; through working, building, sending, travelling, visiting, talking, calling, and exchanging, which is not to say that these processes always go smoothly or are free of conflicts. What is important with this broad understanding of care in regard to migration is to highlight the value of others who are left behind, the inevitable connection between the material and affective issues, and the care provided in Spain in the form of labour as part of a larger account of family reconfiguration in faraway towns and of the global transformation of economic and affective life. More than a commodity, mobile care should thus be understood as a world of daily practices and social connections in which people actively engage with one another through the ongoing circulation of money, favours and gifts or by putting themselves in the service of absent others, which in turn recreates intimacy and mutual indebtedness.

My focus on the mobility of care joins these recent efforts to place the concept of care in motion and develop ‘the portability of care as a concept’ (Huang et al. 2012:131). It attempts to reinterpret care by broadening the view of the family beyond its nuclear form, looking at the centrality of caring practices and the interaction of moral commitments with material aspects, and also by understanding transnational migration to Spain from the perspective of the intimacy of family life in Ecuador. The emphasis turns toward a fluid idea of care that shapes and is shaped by definitions of family as it travels, since care and family become mutually constitutive. As Olwig puts it: ‘. . . the nature of family relationships emerges through the exchange of care . . .’ (2014: 136). Seeing things in this way, the topic of family life becomes increasingly important while explaining the mobility of care throughout the study.

Moving beyond false dichotomies

Through an ethnographic study of Ecuadorian transnational lives, this thesis aims to contribute to the de-stigmatisation of migrant families.

Dyadic visions are at the basis of the public stigmatisation of migrant mothers and their ‘left-behind’ children and families, and this study calls attention to the risks of ‘etic’ or analytical models contributing to such ‘emic’ stigmatisation. While writing this thesis, I read a headline advising migrant parents in a local Barcelona newspaper: ‘*Enviar dinero no soluciona la falta de afecto*’ (Sending money isn’t a replacement for a lack of affection, Raíces-Ecuador 2007). Migrant parents are often condemned for ‘having abandoned their children’ or ‘giving them only money or material things’ (see also Boccagni 2012), opinions that stress their assumed ‘incapacity’ to meet the real needs, since alternative caregivers are seen as imperfect surrogates and inadequate in compensating for the absence of biological mothers (see other critics in Yarris 2017:6, Coe 2014:59), while distant care is judged as ‘aberrant’ (Baldassar 2016:146).

By focusing on the mobility of care—attending to the worries of these families and individuals who desperately try to balance how much is possible, what is good enough to send, to give, to receive—the study attempts to move beyond a series of dichotomies that have structured not only public debates concerning Ecuadorian migration to Spain, but more generally academic discussions that concern the feminization of international migration. Focusing on processes rather than dyadic categories, the study engages with issues surrounding gender, labour, and economy, which in turn allow us to consider questions of care more broadly.

First, the study denaturalises engendered notions of care as an inherent ability of women, while recognising that most of the burden of attentiveness is socially assumed to be female. To attend to (*atender*) the concrete performances of care, constitutes a way of showing love, obligation and responsibility, but also provides a window on economic, social and gender hierarchies. As a highly gendered term, *atender*, as well as the category of the ‘attentive, committed, sacrificing woman’, raise important questions about male and female spheres of action and their places in families and social networks. Although gender is central in generating value, power, and constitutes a basic structuring principle in any society, it remains open to change (Stolcke 2006: 543, 546). Gender is fluid, malleable, and has no fixed content (Gemzöe et al. 1989, Moore 1988, Kessler and McKena 1985 [1978]), varying between different social situations (Boehm 2008), while resisting change (Gutmann 2007 [1996]). Throughout this study I follow attentiveness, commitments and sacrifices in which women avoid taking ideas of female subjugation

for granted, searching instead for alternative interpretations of their lives of giving and receiving care. In particular, I keep in mind that the distribution of tasks between men, women, and generations does not immediately reflect inequality, but should be understood in relation to historical patterns of reciprocity and solidarity, and also larger power relations within and beyond the contours of the family, in combination with migration regimes.

Second, an analysis of caring relations necessarily involves accounts of feelings, emotions, and affects, sometimes used as overlapping terms.⁶ Observing that affects and emotions often overlap, McKay (2016:5) claims that, ‘affect is simultaneously a body capacity, a force, and an object of political action, but is not easily reducible to people’s accounts of their emotions or their dispositions’. The author states moreover that affect produces connection and disconnection (Ibid.), and that ‘affect underpins care’ (2016:6). In the context of the commodification of feelings, Hochschild, with her widely discussed concept of ‘emotional labour’ observes that individuals manage and manipulate their feelings to ‘sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others’ (2003 [1983]:7). When the manipulation of emotions is exchanged for a wage, it is termed ‘emotional labour’, while it is termed ‘emotion work’ or ‘emotion management’ when performed in private life (2003 [1983]). The author observes that individuals who engage in emotional work risk alienation and illness because they put to sale part of the self, which hinges on a problematic distinction between authentic and inauthentic. This has been challenged in terms of ‘intimate labour’ (Parreñas and Boris 2010), a concept that reveals the ‘interconnectivity of love and work’ in care work (2010:1), highlighting how intimacy is not absent but created in jobs that involve people in permanent exchanges of ‘attentiveness and sharing of personal information’ (Parreñas and Boris 2010:4-5). This is in line with Zelizer’s renowned criticism of ‘hostile spheres’ in which social

⁶ Feelings are forms of pre-action (Hochschild 2003 [1983]: 56), they are personal and biographical; emotions are social; and affect is prepersonal and transmittable (Shouse 2005). Affect is not a personal feeling (Massumi 1987 as quoted in Shouse 2005). Emotions are manipulable displayings of feelings (Hochschild 2003 [1983]). Feelings are biographical and exist only in relation to earlier particular experiences (Shouse 2005). See also Rodríguez Gutiérrez (2010) and González Fernández (2018) for discussions of feelings, emotions and affects.

intimacy is sharply divided from economic relations (2005).⁷

More generally, as mentioned earlier, a key contribution of anthropology has been the refusal to see economic spheres as disconnected from moral regulation (Bohannan 1955, Graeber 2014), reminding us that the economy is embedded in kinship and different kinds of social relations (Polanyi 1944).⁸ Anthropologist Ara Wilson coined the concept of ‘intimate economies’ to call attention to an overlapping of market and personal private issues (Wilson 2004). The dichotomies of market and non-market relations, paid and unpaid labour, and rationality and sentiment, have negatively affected our comprehension of what labour is, which activities are worthy of payment, and how rules of the market can meet the needs of care. Beyond labour, in relations at a distance, the circulation of money, gifts and favours create intimacy showing love, presence and companionship (see for instance McKay 2007, Coe 2011).

Third, there is a false dichotomy between gifts and commodities, as it is possible to think of multiple kinds of interwoven economic systems. As Marcel Mauss (1990 [1950]) put it in *The Gift*, the ‘nature and intentions of the contracting parties, the nature of the thing given, are all indivisible’ (1990:60). Things cannot be interpreted as separated from those who give or receive, because they form ‘a total social system’ (Mauss 1990 [1950]). Following Mauss, I see the exchange of gifts, things and services as valuable forms of creating, expanding and strengthening social relations, as such, as another form of care. They generate moral indebtedness and an urgency to reciprocate, and simultaneously (re)-draw social hierarchies. As Peebles reminds us: ‘Mauss asserts that credit and debt greatly contribute to building hierarchy and dominance, but they are also the keys to building group solidarity’ (Peebles 2010:226).

The separation of money and gifts is reproduced in the distinction between rationality and affect, and between market and family. To overcome these dichotomies, we need a perspective that takes account of the power of meaning of the things that are sent and

⁷ Zelizer’s criticism of ‘hostile spheres’ is presented in her book *Purchasing Intimacy*: ‘In this account, a sharp divide exists between intimate social relations and economic transactions. On one side, we discover a sphere of sentiment and solidarity; on the other, a sphere of calculation and efficiency. Left to itself, goes the doctrine, each works more or less automatically and well. But the two spheres remain hostile to each other. Contact between them produces moral contamination’ (Zelizer 2005:22).

⁸ For instance, Paul Bohannan (1955) in the 1950s analysed the moral economy of the Tiv through a hierarchy of three different spheres of exchange. Each represented a universe of objects and was regulated by specific moral values.

the words and favours that are shared at a distance, and their capacity to produce and sustain social relations. In line with this, the study understands the circulation of money and gifts as fundamental for the fulfilment of family commitment, as ‘material care is central to intergenerational webs of responsibility and is a form of social security’ (Coe 2011:15). Separating money from feelings makes it difficult to see how they are deeply entrenched in daily life.

In sum, my study is a contribution to these efforts to incorporate care in its dynamic form in the analysis of Ecuadorian transnational families, and this is done through challenging different kinds of binary distinctions, such as between love and money and between authentic emotions and wage labour. In my study, care is seen as circulating at home and transnationally through different geographical points and hands, binding people together through the force of affect and material possibilities. Finally, care is, in the absence of an institutional system of social protection, a resource and a moral responsibility assumed among a network of interdependent individuals who share particular notions of family and support, despite the sacrifices of separation and the difficulties caused by social inequality.

Crisis and migration in Ecuador

With an estimated population of 16.5 million in 2017 (INEC) Ecuador is one of the smallest countries in South America. It is in the Andean region between Colombia, Peru and the Pacific Ocean. Ecuador has four geographical regions: the highlands, also called the Andes or Sierra; the coastal lowlands or Costa; the Amazonas or Oriente; and the Galapagos Islands. The national economy is dominated by exports, most notably of oil, but also bananas, shrimp, coffee, cocoa, cut flowers and fish. The country is extremely vulnerable to the fluctuation of prices in the world market, although remittances have helped to stabilise the financial balance during the last two decades. Beyond global crises and natural catastrophes, financial mismanagement by the local elites is among the main causes of Ecuador’s difficulties of overcoming underdevelopment. One example of this was the crisis of the end of the 1990s.

While the 1980s saw rising prices of basic products and few

opportunities for social mobility, the late 1990s were devastating. In Ecuador, the global recession coincided with natural disasters, low oil prices, war with neighbour Peru, and especially, a deepening political and economic crisis caused by bank failure. These factors were at the root of the economic debacle that initiated the largest wave of outmigration in Ecuadorian history. President Jamil Mahuad came to office in August 1998 during a period of intense political instability, as Ecuador had six presidents in 10 years.⁹ That same year President Mahuad attempted to pass numerous neoliberal reforms in order to secure funding from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to ease the economic crisis. Also, the National Congress approved a law of AGD (Deposit Insurance Agency),¹⁰ in which the Central Bank was allowed to cover bank losses. From August 1998 until 2000 the Government of Ecuador transferred US\$ 6 billion to the bank sector. However, this did not avert financial catastrophe. Many banks closed, transferring their debts (*los pasivos*) to the state, while moving the received loans together with their own assets and properties abroad. In March 1999, President Mahuad froze the majority of bank accounts in an effort to stop capital flight, as people withdrew their savings in the wake of the devaluation of the Sucre, the national currency, which was finally abandoned in favour of the US dollar through a presidential decree one year later. In this process, people saw their savings frozen at the lowest rates before their conversion to dollars. The result was a significant transfer of wealth from Ecuadorians to the financial bank sector (Salgado n. d.: 6-8).¹¹

In September 1999, Ecuador defaulted on its national debt payments, as social sectors, headed by empowered indigenous organizations and with the tacit support of military forces, announced massive protests demanding the president's resignation. People's frustrations increased. As the protests escalated in the streets, the main roads were blocked and within a few days, President Mahuad was forced to step down from office. A three-member junta immediately replaced Mahuad, but within a few hours his former vice-president

⁹ Historically, this has been repeatedly observed in Ecuador. Between 'early 1920s and late 1940s the country changed hands over twenty times' (De la Torre and Striffler 2008:4).

¹⁰ In Spanish AGD, Agencia de Garantía de Depósitos.

¹¹ According to Ecuadorian specialist Wilma Salgado, the total sum transferred to banks by the state was equivalent to the total national budget for 13 years of education, 39 years of health and community development, or 42 years of farming development. Salgado's statement in this account continues: '... or 70 years of poverty bonds (*bonos de la pobreza*) which was 6 dollars per month for 1 million mothers, 3 dollars for 252,000 elderly and 5000 people with disabilities' (Salgado 2004:28).

Gustavo Noboa assumed the presidency. Noboa gathered a group of ministers selected from the elite of entrepreneurs and continued the dollarisation plan and other austerity measures. The result of the political turmoil of January 2000 was, according to scholar Catherine Walsh, ‘a strengthening of the neoliberal agenda and the consolidation of business and elite sectors within the government institution’ (Walsh 2001:173).

The crisis caused high inflation, left large portions of the population unemployed and without savings, and led to the bankruptcy of at least 3000 small businesses (Salgado 2004). The poor became poorer while members of the middle classes saw their living standards plummet to under the poverty level. At the beginning of the 2000s, inequalities between Ecuador’s rich and poor were among the highest in the world (Lind 2005). The little hope that individuals still had in their own country vanished (Acosta et al. 2006:59-60). Hopes for the future were to be found abroad.

Between 1999 and 2000 about 800,000 people emigrated, as approximately one-fifth of Ecuador’s labour force left the country during this crisis (Kyle and Goldstein 2011:6-8). As a result, around 650,000 Ecuadorians live in the United States, 500,000 in Spain, and 100,000 in Italy. But Ecuadorians are dispersed in many other countries; for example, Germany, Holland, England and France, and in diverse Latin American countries like Chile. It is calculated that around 1,500,000–2,000,000 Ecuadorians now live abroad (Jokisch 2014), many of them as unauthorised migrants. They send home about 2.5 billion US dollars per year (World Bank Prospects Group 2014), sustaining around seven per cent of the households in the country (Ecuador Census 2010). Scholars observed that in the years following the crisis, remittances came to constitute the second largest income for the country after oil (Acosta et al. 2006:96-97, Larrea 2004:44).

As already mentioned, migration to the United States was predominant prior to the crisis. It originated in the economic collapse of the South Andes in the 1950s and 1960s, first as an insignificant trickle, but increasing during the turbulent 1980s and continuing in the 1990s. Migration to the US is commonly identified with low-educated young men from the rural areas (Kyle 2000, Pribilsky 2007), with a small number of women mainly migrating for family reunification (Herrera 2010:56, see also Borrero and Vega 1995). Many of the Ecuadorians in the US are undocumented migrants who travelled along the dangerous Mexico–US corridor via Panama and Guatemala through a network of moneylenders (*chulqueros*) and smugglers

(*coyotes*).

Migration to Spain in the late 1990s was very different. Mothers who left their children behind predominated among the early migrants, with the number of migrant men increasing thereafter. The flow of migration to Spain was dominated by individuals who came primarily from Guayas, Pichincha and Azuay, the country's three main provinces. A significant number of migrants were middle-class and lower-middle-class people, many of whom were professionals who could afford the costs of the trip with their own capital or were able to secure loans.¹² Acosta described these as migrants who did not search for satisfaction of their basic needs, but for the betterment of or to recoup their personal and family income level (2002:15). Similar patterns characterised migration from other Latin American countries (Kyle and Goldstein 2011). Migratory patterns between Ecuador and Spain, however, have historical origins linked to different bilateral agreements (Carrillo and Cortés 2008). For instance, an Agreement of Immigration was signed in 1957 to facilitate emigration of Spaniards to Ecuador, while the *Canje de Notas* (Exchange of Letters) allowed Ecuadorians to enter Spain on a three-month visa.¹³ In other words, mobility between the two countries was broadly supported, creating a basis for a migration boom in the late 1990s. In general, such agreements had to be adapted to a new reality when Spain became a member of the European Union in 1986.

In Ecuador, intensive debates about transnational migration emerged with the great wave of emigration following the economic crisis of the late 1990s (Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002, Ramirez and Ramirez 2005, Acosta et al. 2006, Herrera et al. 2005).¹⁴ Hundreds of thousands of Ecuadorians headed mainly to Spain, dramatically altering the earlier pattern of migration oriented to the United States.

¹² More than being strictly associated with production and economic resources, in this thesis I consider class as 'aspiration' in relation to a desired idealised 'particular style of family life and consumption patterns' generally associated with elites and urban middle classes. The attitudes and ideals that support such a lifestyle are thus available beyond the group formally signalled as middle class (Coe 2014:64,185).

¹³ Other examples include the 'Hispano-Ecuadorian Convention of Social Insurance' (revised 1974), and the 'Convention of double Hispano-Ecuadorian citizenship' celebrated in 1964 (Carrillo and Cortés 2008:428-9).

¹⁴ There are also a few reports on migration to the US in the early 1990s. They described migration from the most traditional sending regions, the Azuay and Cañar Provinces in the South Andes, also called 'El Austro' (see for example, Carpio Benalcázar 1992, Borrero Vega et al 1995). US-based scholars later analysed remittances and symbolic factors and changes in rural Ecuador (Jokisch 1998, Wamsley 2001). They dealt with transnational rural migration to the US and the place of indigenous people (Kyle 2000, Meisch 2002).

As an alternative to initial economic interpretations of this migration, some authors explored gender-related reasons for migration, like domestic violence or women's desires for autonomy (c.f. Camacho 2009, Herrera and Martínez 2002, Pedone 2006, Wagner 2007). An initial treatment of the topic of 'transnational motherhood' attempted to show that the migration of mothers was not destroying families and the provision of care, thus contradicting Ecuadorian public opinion. Following this, Wagner discussed stereotypes formed around female migration, and compared it with older practices of tending children, who had been left in the hands of others (2007, 2008). Carrillo and Herrera, in an article about family transformation, collected initial observations of how Ecuadorian families worked with their arrangements of care in the face of the parents' absence, and suggested the importance of grandmothers, extended families, and differences between an absent mother or father, or both, to look at the impacts of migration (2009). Finally, Herrera, calling our attention to a historical perspective, has developed an analysis of the social organization of care with a focus on policy, social inequality and gender transformation in relation to the limited support that families get from the Ecuadorian state (Herrera 2013).¹⁵

Ecuadorians in Spain

Prior to joining the European Union (EU), many people were emigrating from Spain. However, the economic development that soon followed after Spain joined the EU made the country dependent on foreign workers and immigration figures rose. At the same time, fertility rates dropped as young well-educated Spanish women increasingly looked for opportunities to combine careers with marriage and children. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, the low participation of men in household chores and the limited welfare efforts of the state reinforced family traditions in which domestic and care tasks were an exclusive female domain. As a result, domestic

¹⁵ Scholarly production about Ecuadorian migration is much larger now. I only mention a few of them. Flacso Ecuador (Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences) continuously publishes the current debates about Ecuadorian and Latin American migration that include topics as networks, families and identities (see for instance Herrera et al. 2005, Herrera and Ramirez 2008).

workers became increasingly common, offering a form of work attractive to rural migrants and housewives who could earn an income and secure a pension. Despite the growing participation of Spanish women in paid domestic and care work, a shortage of labour remained within the new service economy, especially in the areas of housework and care for children and elderly. There were also labour shortages within the construction, tourism and the agricultural sectors (Pedone 2006:56-57). As was common in other parts of the world, migrant women came to fill a great part of the emerging 'care deficit' (Hochschild 2002).

In the 1990s, this vacuum came to be filled by expanded immigration from the Philippines, North Africa, Latin America and later Eastern Europe. For Spain, using foreign labour represented a more inexpensive option than building up the country's welfare system or encouraging gender equity in the household. Between 1998 and 2008, the total number of immigrants increased from 637,000 to about 5.2 million, of which 56 per cent came from five countries: Morocco, Ecuador, Colombia, Argentina and Bolivia (Alonso 2010: 55-57). The Ecuadorians represented about half a million and settled mainly in Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Murcia. Data from 2007 shows that of all Latin American migrants, women from Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia and Dominican Republic were the most well-represented workers in the sector of care and domestic service (Oso Casas and Villares Varela 2008:163).

A range of factors were decisive in redirecting Ecuadorian migration from the US to Spain in the late 1990s: the aggravated economic and political situation in Ecuador, the rising costs and risks of crossing the Mexico–US border,¹⁶ and the growing demand for low-skilled and service workers in Spain. The possibility of joining the process of migrant regularisation and the large Spanish informal economy—which made up around 19 per cent of GNP in 2014¹⁷—

¹⁶ In general, the price of the journey increased during the 1990s from 5000 to 12000 US dollars (See Borrero Vega et al., see also Carpio 1992:101). In 2001-2002 the undocumented trips to the United States was calculated at around 12000 US dollars while to Spain the cost was between 3500 and 4000 US dollars (Gratton 2007:586). During fieldwork the price of the journey to the United States was up to 15000 US dollars, according to some of the research participants who had friends and relatives and who themselves wanted to attempt this trip.

¹⁷ The Huffington Post, 26 November 2014. The informal economy in Spain represents around 190 000 million Euro, 18.6% of GNP. Proportionally, it is double that of France, Germany or UK.

http://www.huffingtonpost.es/2014/11/26/economia-sumergida-randstad_n_6227812.html Accessed January 2017.

also became a major attraction for migrant labour. In a largely consolidated informal market, migrants make ends meet before they gain legal status during the next process of regularisation, as has been common in Italy, Greece, and Portugal (Bettio et al. 2011:312-313). Moreover, a decisive factor appealing to Ecuadorians was the relative ease by which Ecuadorians were able to entry Spain as tourists for 90 days without a visa through the 1963 Hispano-Ecuadorian Agreement (Kyle and Goldstein 2011:8, see also Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002). According to Kyle and Goldstein (2011), before the 1990s only a few Ecuadorians had used the opportunity offered by this agreement. It was utilised by tourist firms that saw a new niche during the crisis, after having been hit by a scarcity of clients for traditional tourism (2011). For many Ecuadorians, going to Spain also represented a middle step before the United States, the latter often expressed as their ‘actual’ desire. Before 2003—when the European Union began to require visas for Ecuadorians—as citizens in a former Spanish colony, Ecuadorians could enter Spain on a three-month tourist visa. These ‘tourists’ could then search for a job and overstay. Being employed was the way to get a temporary permission of residence.

Ecuadorians migrated to Spain intensively in a short period of time, in what scholars have called *la estampida migratoria*, ‘the migratory rush’ (Ramirez and Ramirez 2005), or ‘the panic to leave’ (Jokisch and Pribilsky 2005). ‘One pulled the other, forming chains and networks’ (*uno jala a otros*), as Ecuadorians told Pedone (2006). In Spain, women generally found various forms of care work. Once established, mothers like Aracely in the opening vignette immediately brought over some children while leaving others at home. Countless transnational families have been formed in this way. In 2001 200,000 Ecuadorians received legal permits in Spain after public demonstrations following a tragic accident of a car transporting migrant workers in the agricultural area of Murcia.¹⁸ In 2005, an official process of regularisation took place, as Spain granted legal status to around 200,000 Ecuadorians, many of whom reunited with their children and other relatives. The same year, further legislation allowed Latin American migrants to naturalise after two years of continuous legal residence. In 2008, however, 34 per cent of the men and 39 per cent of the women who had migrated to Spain still declared that they had at least one child younger than 18 left in Ecuador

¹⁸ Twelve Ecuadorians died when a car crashed with a train in Murcia, El Pais, January 4th 2001.

http://elpais.com/diario/2001/01/04/espana/978562801_850215.html

(Flacso-Unfpa 2008). From 2008 until 2013, nearly 156,000 Ecuadorians were granted temporary legal status by reason of family reunion. This happened during the serious financial crisis that struck the United States and Europe in 2008 as unemployment in Spain reached over 24 per cent, while the figures for foreigners was around 36.5 per cent.¹⁹ In this current situation, Spain is no longer a promised land for Ecuadorians. However, the number of Ecuadorians living there still attracts relatives and friends to visit or to reunite. Everybody knows that getting a job is about having good contacts and knowing how to move within a new environment. Thus, around two decades after the great emigration, families continue to manage caring relations at a distance, struggling with their daily dilemmas of returning, reuniting or moving elsewhere as new economic and political crises threaten their lives in different countries.

Fieldwork

This thesis is based on extended fieldwork conducted in and around the cities of Barcelona and Guayaquil, in Spain and Ecuador respectively. The emphasis is not on places but on social relations. However, I want to illustrate here some details of the places, and how I conducted fieldwork struggling to gain insight into the lives of people who were constantly moving around the city while being myself in permanent movement in a form of multi-sited, translocal fieldwork (Hannerz 2001). Discussing the difficulties of conducting fieldwork in different countries, Hage claims that he did not study a ‘multi-sited reality’, but rather ‘one site, the site occupied by the transnational family’ (2005:466). I consider this approach useful for thinking about my own fieldwork following families and caring relations, and my own anxieties concerning the ‘depth’ of the fieldwork.

Guayaquil and Barcelona are the main ports in the respective countries and important centres of intensive commercial activity. Barcelona is located beside the Mediterranean Sea and has a population of 1.6 million people, of which nearly a third are migrants. While I kept in contact with my research respondents in downtown

¹⁹ La Vanguardia, January 26, 2013

<http://www.lavanguardia.com/economia/20130126/54362416153/tasa-paro-extranjeros-espana-36-5.html> Accessed January 18 2015

Barcelona, the Municipality of Hospitalet de Llobregat in Provincia de Barcelona, located southwest in Cataluña Autonomous Community, became after many difficulties the other geographical focus of fieldwork. Hospitalet, as locals simplify the name of the area, had a high concentration of Ecuadorians and Latin Americans when this study began in 2007. There, my visits and contacts were progressively concentrated to a barrio that I call Via Bella,²⁰ located around the metro station with the same name. To reach Via Bella one has to travel 30 minutes by metro from downtown Barcelona. According to the municipal authorities of Hospitalet, in 2007 there were 12,000 Ecuadorians living there, the second largest Ecuadorian city in Spain after Madrid.²¹ In Hospitalet around 30 per cent of residents were born in another country. Most were from Latin America, others from Asia and Middle East. Hierbabuena Street, the heart of Via Bella, is full of shops and restaurants oriented to Latino customers. Many billboards advertise Ecuadorian coastal food (*ceviches, encebollados, cangrejos*), small grocery shops with Latin American products (so-called *colmados latinos*, as in the Dominican Republic), abundant real estate offices, endless numbers of cybercafés (or *locutorios*),²² with bulletin boards announcing rooms or beds for rent and advertising for cleaning or caring jobs. During the global crisis in 2008, many Latino shops were closing, leaving room for new ones with new managers. Instead of *latinoamericanos*, migrants from Pakistan, China, and India ran the shops, but the places still kept their billboards with a tricolour flag similar to that of Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia. This showed the importance of the Latin American population as potential consumers.

Finding Via Bella Station took longer than I had expected. Friends I knew in Barcelona prior to fieldwork had told me that Ecuadorians would be easily found everywhere. However, trying to initiate lasting relationships turned to be extremely difficult, since people were not at home during the day and often on the move. In my first phase of fieldwork I met Ecuadorians and Latin Americans in the streets and squares of Barcelona and spontaneously created

²⁰ Following anthropological convention, the name of this Metro Station, the names of small towns in Ecuador, and the names of all research participants are pseudonyms. Authorities and public figures are presented with their own names.

²¹ Ignacio Husillos, the Director of Integration of Hospitalet's municipality claimed this in an interview.

²² *Locutorio* is a small room with computers and/or phone cabinets where clients can use the internet and call at low prices. In Barcelona they are available in all barrios. *Locutorio* is the name used in Spain, while in Ecuador the most common names for such rooms are cybercafés, cyber and *cabinas*.

opportunities to start a conversation. I often asked where I could find an Ecuadorian restaurant, an Ecuadorian association, or where and when Ecuadorians played volleyball. I knew these were common occasions and points of encounter. After that, the conversation of where I was from automatically came to the fore. Since I am myself an Ecuadorian migrant in Sweden, my interlocutors and I could continue to talk about our different countries or about Ecuador. However, people often had to rush to their jobs or go home after an arduous day of work. I took every chance for conversations and, when I was allowed, accompanied Ecuadorians from downtown Barcelona, where I rented an apartment, to the outskirts of the city on the metro lines.

During the first month, I spent most of my time walking and talking with people in the streets, and visiting Latino NGOs, migrant associations, the Catholic Mission Caritas, and teachers at the Departments of Anthropology in University of Barcelona and Autonomia University. I also met authorities of the Ecuadorian embassy and the Departments of Integration at City Hall in Barcelona and Hospitalet. I also contacted some friends who had been living there longer than 20 years. Additionally I frequently visited the *locutorios* to call my family in Ecuador and to see if opportunities to talk with other Ecuadorians occurred. Visits to Latino restaurants and shops that exhibited the Ecuadorian flag became daily experiences. From the beginning, I found it was easy to talk with leaders of organisations and associations, but they all had the same discourse about family disintegration or the promises of the new government. Mostly, I wanted to meet common Ecuadorian workers and ask how they had managed their new lives, separated or reunited with their families. The newspapers at the time wrote a lot about family destruction due to female migration.²³ In Ecuador, having gone to Europe was no longer valued as it was before, a symbol of status and glamorous adventure. Instead, stigma and shame seemed to mark the journeys to Spain. In Barcelona, some Ecuadorians refused to be called migrants, while other actively identified themselves as different from ‘the new poor migrants who looked for jobs’—meaning those who had arrived in late 1990s. I became obsessed with showing another face of migration that recognises Ecuadorians’ efforts, obligations and sacrifices, as immersed in global inequality. This, of course, has influenced my research questions and the final text.

²³ For a discussion on media, family and migration in Ecuador, see Ramos 2010.

After one month of exploring Barcelona in the summer 2007, I accepted that I could not collect deeper information without a defined physical starting point, without establishing lasting relations with interlocutors. I wanted to visit them in their homes, become friends with them, or accompany them where they went. Constant movement was not fruitful for me at the time, and I longed for fieldwork in only one place. A watershed moment was the day when I attended two large rallies with the newly elected Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa in July 2007, one in downtown Barcelona and the other in Via Bella, on Hierbabuena Street, where coincidentally I had already spent the previous weeks. There I was finally able to connect with Ecuadorians and involve myself in spontaneous conversations while helping them take pictures of themselves with authorities and friends. During the rally, I told one woman that I was writing a book about the life of Ecuadorians in Barcelona and she told this to other friends, who enjoyed the moment and challenged me with ideas on what I should write about. As in the snowball method, one encounter led to another, which led to invitations to visit homes the same day and in the following months.

Some months later, I again visited the same families on my way to Ecuador. I described my desires to meet their children, elderly parents and other relatives in Ecuador. Most people gladly provided phone numbers and contacted their families before I came to Guayaquil. They even sent some presents with me. The families of my interlocutors in Ecuador lived in three relatively small cities that belong to Guayas Province, and which I will call Las Palmas, Paraíso and La Victoria. People living in these towns work, study or have relatives in Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city and the capital of Guayas Province, located in the lowlands of the country close to the Pacific Ocean. People in the interviews often talked proudly about this city, describing Guayaquil's downtown as clean, modern and big, and compared it with the 'old' Barcelona.

Ecuadorians in this study identify themselves as *costeños* and *costeñas* (literally, born in the coastal lowlands). Proud of their close relations to the country's largest city, Guayaquil, they also introduced themselves in Spain as *guayaquileños*, when asked where in Ecuador they come from. In Ecuador, they are conscious of their differences with the indigenous peoples of the highlands whom they often called *serranitos*, referring in such way not exactly to the rich diversity of indigenous population of the country, but to people who speak 'more slowly,' who often sell fruits and vegetables in the local market of

their neighbourhoods. People from the highlands also refer to lowlanders, the *costeños*, as *monos* (monkeys), with regard to their rapid way of speaking, ‘wide-awake style’ and their ‘social openness’. Clearly, Ecuador’s geography, dramatically divided by the Andes Mountains into highlands and lowlands, have shaped a history of regionalism which is reproduced in how people identify each other daily (for a comprehensive account on regionalism and region formation in Ecuador, see Maignashca 1994, Andrade 2014).

It is well known that Ecuador’s coastal population has been formed by migration from the Andes. Guayaquil and the Province of Guayas formed through arrivals of indigenous highlanders running away from the hacienda system in search for work in the cacao plantations in late 1780s to 1830s (Contreras 1994, Pineo 1994), and later in the banana and sugar plantations in the middle-to-late 1900s (Striffler 2002, Lenz 1997). In the 1962 Census nearly half of all the population in Guayas were migrants from the Sierra (Estrada quoted in Middleton 1979). Coastal populations were also formed by the import of African slaves and flows of earlier migrants from places such as Lebanon, Peru, and Spain. Internal mobility between different coastal provinces is also significant; for instance, the drought in the province of Loja and Manabí pushed people to Guayas.

My research respondents identify themselves neither as white nor Indian (or Indigenous), and *mestizo* is a term they never mention.²⁴ Mainly, my respondents identified themselves as people of

²⁴ *Mestizo* and *mestiza* is a term applied to people of mixed origins. Notoriously, Ecuadorians do not use the word in daily conversation but mostly when they are asked by researchers or while responding the questions of the national census about ethnic composition. According to Pitt-Rivers (as quoted in Roberts 2012:103), *mestizos* are the mixture of two totemic originary groups, the Spaniards and the natives, whose often-violent combination formed many Latin American nations (1973). *Mestizo*, the product of the process of *mestizaje*, is understood as the mixing of races that Roberts signals as ‘one of the cornerstones of the Ecuadorian national ideology’ (2012:102). Wade (2005) observes that in studies of *mestizaje* in Latin America an emphasis has predominated on *mestizaje* as an ideology of nation-building, ‘an all-inclusive ideology of exclusion’ (Stutzman 1981), and even as ‘potentially subversive’ (e.g. Anzaldúa 1987). Wade proposes instead to study *mestizaje* as a ‘lived process of the mixed-ness’ that operates within the embodied person and within family and kinship relationships (2005:239). Roberts’s writing on Ecuador reminds us that: ‘*Mestizaje* is embedded in practices of race, gender and kinship that began during the Spanish conquest and were furthered during the Inquisition, reinforced through the battle for nationhood and promulgated in the labour relations of the hacienda’ (2012:102). Marks of colonial history is a daily experience for Ecuadorians. If asked about ethnic identity and in conversations concerning race and skin colour, my research respondents surely could answer that they were *mestizos* or some of them might say ‘whiter than other.’ Some of them described having less problems in their

business. '*Los negocios es lo nuestro*' (business is our thing), they often said, talking about themselves as restless persons engaged in multiple sources of income, mixing often basic education and 'good behaviour' with the opening of a shop as sources for social mobility. As we will see in this thesis, they often had or wanted to start a business. In fact, 'a commercial mentality had been well established in the port city of Guayaquil by 1890' (Middleton 1979).

In February 2008, I came to Ecuador to live with Gloria's and Pepe's three children in Paraíso, close to Guayaquil (see more information about the main participants of this study in the Appendix). Gloria and Pepe became two of my key informants, a couple in their fifties whom I first met in Barcelona, and we have kept in touch since. Their children lived close to an elder sister and their grandmother in the same town. I constantly travelled from Paraíso to the other towns and downtown Guayaquil. When different families invited me to stay at their homes, I gratefully accepted and followed them in their daily activities. I shared meals, family meetings, birthday celebrations, and their search for visas at the embassy in Quito. We were constantly involved in conversations during these activities. I also accepted their friends' and acquaintances' contact details. When I became a bit closer to them, I took the opportunity to start with more formal interviews, sometimes in groups around informal meals, but mostly individually.

69 persons were interviewed in the first phase fieldwork in Barcelona and Ecuador. The ages of the interviewees ranged from 10 to 80 years. Of this group, I interviewed 52 (35 women and 17 men) a second time. Of the 35 women, I later concentrated on seven of them and their families. These women, with their partners, children, sisters, brothers, parents and friends, were repeatedly observed and interviewed between 2007 and 2011. With many of them I still have conversations on the phone, email, and nowadays via Skype, Whatsapp and Facebook. Many people also inexplicably disappeared during the process of fieldwork, while others never came to our first planned interview. The interviews lasted between 1-2 hours and concerned individuals' migration biographies and their familial relationships. I tried to capture individual experiences of their own and others' migration and future prospects. The questions were organised starting with reasons for migration, the family composition,

encounter with Spaniards than other migrants who 'looked more like Ecuadorians'. By this they meant that they looked more like indigenous people from the highlands.

their jobs before and after migration, accommodation, and ideas of returning and reunion. In general, this was my own structure, but on each occasion I adapted it to follow the flow of peoples' conversation. The questions also took a different path in the second phase of fieldwork in Barcelona when I became most concerned with the management of life at a distance. By then, in contrast to the first phase, people could more openly describe their personal stories about partners, parents and children.

In sum, the different phases of fieldwork resulted in three long periods and a series of short visits. Three of my respondents have also visited me in Sweden in the following years. I stayed in Barcelona during my first visit in the summer of 2007, from June to October. After that, I briefly visited my informants again in the beginning of January 2008 to tell them of my plan to visit Ecuador and to ask them if I could contact their families. Later, I spent the period between January and July 2008 in Guayaquil, travelling back and forth to the other towns. I later returned to Barcelona to meet the families again and stayed there between February and July 2009. This time the interviews were unplanned and became deeper. The women I had kept in touch with came frequently to my apartment for a chat and to share a meal, and they invited me to their homes to eat lunch on weekends and even to sleep in their places. We had much in common to talk about after I had met their families in Ecuador. During fieldwork, I conducted participant observation at homes and during leisure times, I joined them for informal meetings with other friends, and in Barcelona I myself organised dinners and meetings where the informants could meet each other. I never observed women at their work of cleaning and caring for elderly, but I observed directly the women meeting around Yanbal direct sales,²⁵ one working as cashier, another working in the metro stations and the other giving pedicure and manicure at homes, since I myself encouraged friends to buy her services. The sections about women at work are mostly based on women's own descriptions, and on the discussions they had with each other while I was present.

The women who are the focus of this study had been living in Barcelona for eight to twelve years when I met them (more

²⁵ Yanbal is a brand of cosmetics, jewellery, perfumes and toiletries for men, women and children. Many women are involved in its network of direct sellers. Yanbal is distributed in Latin America and more recently also in Spain following the migration flows of people. Yanbal is identified with its orange colour and involves mostly women but does not exclude men. See the extended work of Casanova about this in Guayaquil (2011).

information about the main women participating in this research can be found in the Appendix). They worked in diverse sectors, particularly in caring for the sick and elderly, cleaning and domestic work, while others worked as nurses, hairdressers and nail specialists, or, in one case, as an information officer in the subway system. These Ecuadorian migrant women were well-educated. While many had not completed their university degrees, most had graduated from high school (*colegio*).²⁶ When they worked as domestic workers (*empleadas de hogar*), caregivers or cleaners, they often experienced a form of downward social mobility. In Ecuador, they had had jobs as schoolteachers and office staff or ran their own small businesses. In addition, their lives had gone from experiencing care in a primary social environment consisting of children, spouses, parents, and other relatives, toward giving care and doing domestic work in the Spanish labour market. Many had at home in Ecuador ‘a girl who helps in the house’ (*una chica que ayuda en la casa*), a role they themselves had taken on in Barcelona. Along with the Spanish migration policy, women’s lower status and their work as caregivers shaped their family and working relationships in Barcelona as well as in their homes in Ecuador. In turn, the forms in which families and family relationships evolved daily fashioned how the labour market developed in Spain; that is, care as labour took a similar form as the gift of care. To observe this process and to understand these transnational families, the thesis will first approach labour relations in Barcelona before continuing with the family dynamic of care in the following chapters; that is, how care works daily for these families.

²⁶ Official data states that Ecuadorians in Spain are generally low educated (see for instance, Jokisch 2014 Online). This disagreement with the realities of the women in my study can be due to how people generally registered themselves to be counted as part of the social security system, which is a possibility even for people without legal status. For example, data from *el padrón* show most women registered as domestic workers regardless of their original occupation or level of education. It was important for the women to register in this way in order to get social benefits and be counted in the national system of social security. This helped them to access health services as well as to show their presence in the country, an important fact that could lead later to legal residence. <http://migrationpolicy.org/article/ecuador-mass-emigration-return-migration>

Outline

I will now briefly outline how all these topics are organised in the chapters of this book. Chapter 2, 'Working in Barcelona', shows one side of women's double lives of care, emphasising how women understand their practices of caring at work in terms of family commitment and attentiveness. Not only are the practical tasks of the jobs highlighted, but also the emotional intricacies, as women are caught between migration policy and family obligations. This chapter sheds light on the complex and ambiguous ways in which women construct family relations beyond their own families, and the relationship between local systems of social protection and restrictive migration policies, in processes that resemble patron-client ties. Moreover, this chapter establishes connections between care labour and the gift of care, observing that there are not fixed divisions between the two but rather that they must be understood in terms of a continuum, as are also the caring journeys of these Ecuadorian women.

Chapter 3, 'Connected People', shows the dynamic social networks that bind people with each other through feelings of being in debt, practices of attentiveness and corresponding portraits of sacrifice. The chapter draws on the intensive social networking of women who develop flexible social constellations in which care is mobilised. Commitments, attentiveness and sacrifices are at the core of this chapter since they form basic conceptions of love and care, as well as the critical support expected from one's social networks. They also may impose tension in social relations as they create access and hopes of access to new resources. *La casa* (the house), a shared project of migrants and left-behinds, will represent the most important and concrete commitment of the parents caring for their children.

Chapter 4, 'Replaceable Mothers', focuses on how relations of care become constructed through daily attentiveness at home. It is about the daily practice of care within the household in Ecuador, in connection to other households and in relation to the maintenance of transnational life. The experiences of 'replacing a mother' and the permanent exchanges of gifts of care go beyond the time of migration to Spain. The chapter will describe long-standing practices of mutual support such as co-parenthood, grandmothers' care, and loyal daughters, as well as practices and ideals that shape family life and social relations, and that facilitate female migration and transnational

life. This chapter builds on the powerful female commitments shown in the previous chapter, illuminating the moral and practical grounds of care.

Chapter 5, 'Like a Woman', deals with gender transformation following couples' attempts to remain together throughout the pressures of tight work schedules, long geographical distances and years of separation. The main question in this chapter is, how do men care? Is there a form of masculine care? The chapter incorporates the lost link of the global care chains, that of gender, men and masculinities. The ethnographic data reveals that since women are absent or partially present at home, men have been left with no other choice than to perform attentiveness, otherwise assumed as an exclusive domain of women. Yet other questions remain: how do men and women interpret these experiences of change to construct meaning for the continuation of their families? How do these experiences shape and reformulate the mobility of care?

Chapter 6, 'For the Children', discusses how children and siblings are involved in the care flow, adapting as well as resisting the requirements of their transnational lives. The emphasis is put on how goals of education and getting ahead (*superación*) are central in the construction of family life at a distance, and for the perspectives and uncertainties about the future reproduction of care. In order to see the tensions between individual and family goals, I discuss the responsibilities of left-behind children in relation to the handling of money, school and domestic tasks, as these aspects are considered central to understand caring relations.

Finally, a summary and some concluding remarks will be offered in Chapter 7, 'Mobilizing care across social and geographical distance'. This final chapter aims to describe the basic elements in the argument of the mobilisation of care, highlighting a 'moral practice' through the description of the dynamics of giving and receiving care for these Ecuadorian women and their families.

CHAPTER 2 | WORKING IN BARCELONA

Care jobs and family commitments

In Barcelona, Lupe nostalgically showed me a painting of Jesus Christ hanging on her wall (see more information about Lupe in the Appendix). She said she was given this beloved object by an elderly woman (*yaya*)²⁷ she had been taking care of. Expressing total dedication, she stated: ‘I did everything for her; I was a cashier, a nurse, a cook. Just imagine: five days after I went to Ecuador to arrange my personal documents and certifications as a nurse, she died. She had said to me: “You won’t find me here when you get back”, and so it was’. Later, Lupe had found a new job with another elderly lady, who was the mother of a doctor. ‘She also died after some time. Her daughter, *la doctora*, used to say to me, “You are like a mother to me, Lupe”. She helped me get a job as a nurse at one of the largest hospitals in Barcelona, where I work now’.

Lupe was of course very grateful. She had repeatedly become close friends with the families with whom she worked as a caregiver. At work, she was extremely flexible, fulfilling diverse roles simultaneously, as family members do. Offering attentiveness and improvisational skills at an inexpensive cost she became the support of the elderly and their families, especially for daughters who were responsible for elderly parents but too busy to directly care for them.²⁸ ‘You are like a mother to me’ is another expression from the employer that Lupe evokes to describe their mutual feelings and her employer’s recognition of her as a significant component of the family. The idea

²⁷ Grandmother in Catalán.

²⁸ The caregiver woman often had to deal with one sick and/or elderly person and his/her family member, often a daughter—sometimes a son—who coordinates the activities with them. In this chapter, I focus either on the worker's relationship to the elderly person whom she cares for, or to a relative who takes the responsibility for the elder. I clarify each case in the text when necessary. Unfortunately, missing here is the employer's perspective because it has not been part of the original research questions.

of offering ‘their best’ at work, giving more than required, was always present in our dialogues, and women emphasised these accounts, thus giving value to their jobs and illustrating their way of creating, maintaining and strengthening affective ties beyond the simple aim of earning an income. These women dropped in social status but gained documents, connections and income in a form of exchange required by the kind of life they had adopted in migration.

In another sense, these immolations were vividly present in the religious motifs of the received gifts that women hung on their walls or kept somewhere in a cardboard box until finding a proper place. These gifts evoked what the women did, their sacrifice in their jobs for their children and families, like Jesus Christ did for the whole of humanity. Employers—especially the elderly receiving care—and employees shared a kind of religious connection through these gifts. These symbols of Christianity were considered sacred, appreciated and respected, but these objects especially contained remembrances of positive experiences. In general terms, Lupe’s account illustrates how individuals involved in ongoing exchanges come to construct their spaces of work, as social dynamics charged with the intimacy and generosity characteristic of an ideal family life. Lupe’s example demonstrates how the family—and how it functions, the expectations around it—defines and shapes how the care labour market works, a form of ‘familiarised labour’, in which it is impossible to differentiate when and where family ends and job starts. Following this thinking, this chapter questions popularised ideas of the separated realms of economy and emotions, or ‘hostile worlds’ (Zelizer 2005), making accounts of the interaction of love and money through the concept of ‘intimate labour’ (Parreñas and Boris 2010). As this chapter will show, the care labour market keeps going because individuals with their emotions and improvisations struggle daily with constructions of intimate bonds.

This chapter deals with labour relations in the country of arrival and the intimate emotional intricacies that this involves. The descriptions are based on women’s understandings of their jobs in terms of intensive attentiveness, family commitments and sacrifices, in relation to the structural constraints that they confront as migrants. Following the multiple ways in which migrant women approach their employers and clients in family-related terms, the chapter focuses on women’s efforts to transform low social status jobs into sources of value, significance and dignity. I argue that women construct social relations and family intimacy at work—beyond biological ties—and in

hierarchical situations; in so doing, they overcome social distance. These relations are produced in the encounters of migrant women with their employers and clients, frequently elderly Spanish pensioners, in which a world of exchanges of affect and material resources is initiated despite social differences, thus following a model of patron-client ties (Wolf 2001 [1966]). In this model, favours and gifts are key issues in the construction of social ties.

The daily attentiveness and commitments that women offer to the elderly they care for and to the families that employ them are basic resources that women carry with themselves and assist them to make a living. They often term their performance of care labour with family expressions as ‘attend to’, ‘care for’ and ‘help’ (*atender, cuidar, ayudar*), instead of ‘work’—expressions explained in the next chapter in more detail. Moreover, the emphasis on intimacy and affect that women put on their commercial transactions at work are in continuity with their own stories in which the intermingling of economic life and family intimacy are the most commonly accepted ways of working and living long before migration; as seen, for instance, in the presents they were expected to give to their own domestic helpers, the indebtedness they feel for an elderly parent, or the typical home-based business.

The topics developed in this chapter bring together the (re)creation of social bonds and intimacy with women’s performances of caring jobs. In this process, the dichotomy of gift and commodity—as well as that of affect versus individual interest—is put into question. Following the concept of ‘intimate labour’, the stories presented in this chapter reveal ‘acts of love and work for money to be interconnected’ (Parreñas and Boris 2010:1). Daily negotiations between employers, employees and the dependent person are mediated by money and affect showing that feelings and commercialised relations are co-constitutive (Bernstein 2010). The chapter sheds light on the complex and ambiguous ways in which women create family connectedness at work and make sense of it, and how this creative process makes evident the relationship between local systems of social protection and restrictive migration policies, as well as the dismantling of the welfare state in Spain.

The ethnographic material presented here contributes to broadening our understanding of women’s attempts to synchronise their experiences and moral conceptions of elderly parents and domestic service with the routines and desires of their employers and the ‘care crisis’ in Spain. At the time of the interviews, all women discussed

here were non-live-in staff, and had residence permits, but many of the described stories had happened when they were still searching for documents to stay legally in Spain. At the time of our conversations, some of them already had Spanish citizenship, or their applications were pending and thus their lives had become slightly better than when they were newcomers, although for the most part they remained in precarious low paid jobs.

Care crisis and domestic service in Spain

In reaction to a growing care crisis in Spain, there is a tendency to blend different arrangements of care that add the possibility of buying inexpensive labour to an already existent mix of market, state and—to a lesser extent—voluntary interventions. The obligated, considerate, self-sacrificing women available at home are no longer taken for granted in the daily organisation of care, as this role is now regularly assigned to migrant women. ‘Care is in transition’ (Vega Solis 2009), and it is in this changing context that the affective and material exchanges between migrants and their employers make sense.

More generally, migration laws govern social and geographical patterns of mobility and come to structure how emotional experiences are shaped and become vivid in spaces of work marked by social hierarchy yet charged by affect. As mentioned earlier, between 1963 and 2003 an agreement allowed Ecuadorians to come to Spain without a visa and to stay as tourists for 90 days. In that period migrants often found jobs in care and domestic work, agriculture, construction or tourism. A labour contract acted as a certificate with which a person could start the legal process that would hopefully lead to permanent residence.²⁹ The success of this process depended mainly on the availability of a sympathetic employer who agreed to support the worker. The personal chemistry between the employer and employee thus became vital. In other words, Spanish law encouraged the

²⁹ After two years of legal residence migrants could apply for Spanish citizenship. In cases of individuals married to a Spanish citizen, the requested time shrunk to only one year. A more complicated way to gain permanent residence was the ‘*Ley de arraigo*’ that requires a migrant to show that she/he has been ‘active in the community’ during a specified period. One of the many ways of doing this was showing receipts of having purchased articles or sent remittances.

migrants' dependence on employers creating a situation in which the daily relationships between employers and employees became emotionally charged. The work might become characterised by feelings of loyalty, trust, and gratitude, and by the conflicts and disappointments that usually occur in close relationships when the expectations are not satisfied.³⁰ This was the context in which caregivers offered their expertise packaged with reciprocity, sacrifice and large doses of attentiveness.

When Spain became part of the European Union in 1986 its service economy grew rapidly. The labour of millions of migrants was needed in the following years. Young Spanish women increasingly joined the labour market despite marriage and children, and fertility figures dropped. With the low participation of men in domestic chores and the weak welfare state—historically with lower social investment than other European countries (Frades Pernas 2010, see also Naldini 2003)—care and housework became largely the domain of grandmothers. With the growing need for domestic workers, there were increasing demands to 'modernise' such work. In practice, the sector had already been regulated by a 'Special Regime' (special social security scheme for household employees) since 1969, but as León explains, though the Regime was meant 'to protect those workers in private homes without formal recognition, household work was not recognised in the labour law until 1985' (2010:414).³¹ For the

³⁰ In general, this is a common global reality of labour relations when systems of social protection are being dismantled, while individuals and the market are left themselves to find the solution for the work-family equation. In Sweden for example, there is a similar situation where a work permit for migrants is linked to employment, which creates a dependent relationship to the employer, often companies instead of families (see Gavanas and Matsson 2011:15, see also Calleman's chapter in Gavanas and Calleman 2013). However, in contrast to Spain, the employment of domestic/care workers at private homes caused public debate in Sweden (*pigdebatten*), where many people still think that every person should tend for her or himself. Like in other European countries, domestic work is nevertheless a growing sector and the attitude of people is becoming more positive (see Gavanas and Williams 2008:19). In Spain it is considered more normal to buy domestic/care work. Those who purchase such services are mostly professionals of the upper middle classes or else the elderly living alone, but progressively the consumption of these services is expanding among other social sectors. For more information, see Peterson (2013) who compares Spain and Sweden more closely.

³¹ As León (2010) explains, there are five Special Regimes in the Spanish labour system (miners, farmers, sea workers, self-employed and household-employed) that coexist with a General Regime. Special Regimes are aimed to protect workers in special contexts, differently from those salaried workers. Spain has been trying to divide workers into two broad categories, salaried and self-employed, but in general, domestic employees cannot take for

domestic service sector, this has generally meant that the right to social benefits was recognised only when the work time exceeded 20 hours per week. No written contract was necessary, and up to 45 per cent of the salary could be paid *in natura*, that is, in food and accommodation (Peterson 2013:136).³² While Spain has the highest figures of registered domestic employees in the European Union, formal and informal domestic service coexist as two parallel systems in the country (León 2010).

Successive debates of how to combine work and family between 1996 and 2004 (when the Conservative party was in power) never challenged the gender organisation of the household, but stimulated family responsibility for the future and welfare of the nation (Peterson 2013:134). Additionally, intergenerational solidarity was emphasised, encouraging unpaid care within the family (Ibid., see also Naldini 2003). In 2007, with the Socialist party in power, paternity leave was approved in order to encourage the participation of men in their children's care, something that could bring families toward more equal gender relations. Currently, however, with two and six weeks of paternity and maternity leave respectively, childcare is still managed privately through the family (see Tobio 2012a, 2012b). Those who can afford it pay expensive private kindergartens or a nanny.³³ The 'grandmother kindergartens', so-called *abuelas guardería* (Thurén, personal communication), part of the family organisation of care, was thought as decreasing in importance in recent years. However, *El País* (April 26, 2016) reports that about 60 per cent of grandparents in the country were actively involved in caring for their grandchildren. Tobio corroborates this information showing full time participation of grandparents in children's care, especially the maternal grandmother (2012a: 866). That includes picking up children at schools and

granted social benefits such as sickness leave, unemployment subsidy and retirement pension, which are common to workers in the General Regime. See León (2010) for an extended explanation of the Spanish labour system in relation to domestic care work.

³² The *in natura* part of the legislation was cancelled in 2009 (Peterson 2013:138). The Special Regime for household employees was modified by the Real Decree 1620/2011 associated with the Law 27/2011 in order to improve the labour conditions and social benefits of domestic workers (see an evaluation in Briones Vozmediano et al. 2014).

³³ There are three kinds of kindergartens in Spain: municipal, *concertadas* and private. A private daily care centre costs around 600 euro/month, and a *concertada* around 300 euro/month. The municipal is the cheapest option but has a bad reputation among families. Prices moreover may vary according to hours that children are left there and the social economic situation of the family. Even the geographic location of the family in respect to the kindergarten influences the price; the closer they live, the less they pay. People are also assigned a rate depending on a particular system of points (*un sistema de puntos*).

kindergartens, feeding them, and taking them to the doctor.³⁴ Even the ‘key-children’ phenomenon is becoming more common,³⁵ demonstrating that Spanish politicians still have much to deal with in responding to the needs of care.³⁶ Childcare, however, has not received the same weight in public debates as the topic of elderly care.

The other challenge for the Spanish welfare state is the aging population. In 2011, 17.3 per cent of the total population were older than 65.³⁷ In 2006 a Law of Dependency (*Ley de Dependencia*, 39/2006) was passed, recognising a minimal payment for someone caring at home, thus indirectly encouraging families to find individual private solutions.³⁸ The money acquired through such assistance is often used to pay an unemployed, low-educated relative, frequently a woman, or an immigrant who has no possibility of finding another kind of job. Still, in Spain, the official debates about domestic and care work tend to focus on what is functional to the labour market. The unpaid domestic work of the ‘housewife’ or ‘working mother’ is debated, while underpaid domestic work generally is not. That means that the laws protect only ‘formally employed citizens’, while irregular migrants and workers in the informal economy do not receive any attention. Added to the urgency to combine family and work with minimal institutional support, large cities experience an expansion of the sector of care domestic work, as well as an

³⁴ El País (April 25 2016) *Los abuelos ya no solo dan chuches*. https://elpais.com/elpais/2016/04/04/actualidad/1459776134_480073.html (Accessed May 15 2017).

³⁵ That means children whom nobody picks up at the school, and who spend the afternoons and evenings without adults, due often to the long days work of parents. Educo, Member of Childfund Alliance (2017) *Nativos de la crisis: los niños de la llave. Una mirada indiscreta a la España que emerge de la gran recesión*. https://educ.org/Educo/media/Documentos/Prensa/Publicaciones/informe_nativosc_risis_educ_2017.pdf (Accessed August 20 2017)

³⁶ Furthermore, according to a Caritas’ report (quoted in Pazos Morán and Medialdea 2015:4), Spain has one of the highest percentages of child poverty in the EU. See *Reorganizar el sistema de cuidados: condición necesaria para la recuperación económica y el avance democrático*. <http://www.trasversales.net/mpbm.pdf> (Accessed January 11 2016).

³⁷ Abellán García and Pujol Rodríguez (2013). *Informes de Envejecimiento en Red*. <http://envejecimiento.csic.es/documentos/documentos/enred-indicadoresbasicos13.pdf> (Accessed March 20 2015).

³⁸ The complete name is ‘*Ley para la promoción de la de autonomía personal y atención a las personas en situación de dependencia*.’ *Dependencia* includes in general people in need of assistance in managing daily life.

increasing social acceptance of the need for inexpensive paid help in homes.³⁹

Gratton (2007:594) points out that the migration wave from Ecuador to Spain in the late 1990s was comprised of ‘women with considerable human capital’. This was typical of emigration from many Latin American countries in the 1990s, when large percentages of the middle classes were affected by economic political disasters. A reality of relatively equal status between employers and migrant domestic care workers in wealthy countries has stimulated discussions of domestic care work as characterised by negotiation (see, for instance, Lutz 2008).

From my perspective, harmony and consensus are especially sought after in labour relations that involve feelings, attentiveness and the daily management of confidential personal information, as is the case in domestic care jobs. In this study, we cannot forget the intimate link between work and the home, or more precisely the ambiguity involved in domestic care labour where ‘work is done at home and vice versa’ (Hochschild 1997). As the concept of ‘emotional labour’ suggests, emotions are socially constructed and people actively manage them to create the possibility to smoothly share spaces of work. Working with their emotions, people make efforts to conform to dominant expectations of how they should feel in certain circumstances, perhaps hiding some emotions while displaying others; the ‘emotion cultures’ are governed by ‘feeling rules’ (Hochschild 2003 [1983]:56-75). Women caregivers work with their feelings and emotions to create a ‘proper state of mind’ in others (2003 [1983]:7). In our case, women’s work generates a family milieu in which not only affect circulates, bonding people together, but in this process, as in ‘economies of affect’ (Richard and Rudnyckij 2009), the worker becomes a family member.

Furthermore, following the fact that Ecuadorians themselves continually remarked on their ‘genuine’ commitment to the elderly and their jobs, I draw on ideas of intermingling or co-existence of

³⁹ Moreover, official voices still contribute to the normalisation of the ideal woman staying at home. Illustrative is the public intervention of Rajoy, the President of the Spanish Government on ‘International Family Day’: ‘Many women decide, because they want to take care of their children, not to work long hours as men do.’ *20 Minutos* (May 15 2015) ‘*Hay muchas mujeres que deciden, porque quieren, cuidar a sus hijos y por tanto no trabajan durante tanto tiempo como lo puede hacer un hombre*’ <http://www.20minutos.es/noticia/2461754/0/rajoy-mujeres/pensiones-bajas/cuidar-hijos/> (Accessed Nov 1 2015)

market and affective transactions. It is not important to elaborate on the genuineness or falsity of attitudes, as in the notion of ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild 2003 [1983]), but to take seriously the flows of affect circulating among individuals. What is particularly significant is to see how individuals construct themselves in this highly commercialised world of affect where money expresses care while love is provided in the form of material things. As Constable argues, there is still much to explore about ‘how the commodification of intimate relations is understood and experienced by those involved in such relationships and processes’ (2009:54).

Performing domestic care labour is one of the few alternatives for migrants in Spain, while the growing elderly population is their essential counterpart. They constitute two sectors that official voices identify as burdens for the economy and society, but caregivers and care receivers themselves recognise the crucial importance of their mutual support. Indeed, they do not have many choices. For migrants, a new world of cross-class social connections is fundamental to the possibility of obtaining legal status in the country of arrival. People negotiate their relations despite of, and because they have, different positions in the social hierarchy. A patron can provide work and connections (*palancas, enchufe*) (Wolf 2001 [1966]: 181). Patron-client relations develop because formal institutional social support is weak, and individuals placed low on the social ladder need a patron’s assistance. The patron in turn has a need for inexpensive care at home. Tracing what migrant domestic care workers give and get, how they feel and talk about their jobs, allows us an understanding of women’s engagement with a local changing system of social protection that remains firmly founded on family ideals.

In the next section, we will see more clearly that, when women describe their jobs in Barcelona, they show their perceptions of social life, domestic work and devotion to elderly that predominate in their country of origin. Attentiveness is the basis of labour relations in an environment simultaneously marked by familial affect and power relations.

Working with attentiveness

How do migrant women manage to construct familial intimacy under unequal social conditions? How do women deal with their feelings of attentiveness and devotion, or with the shame that their jobs may involve? I argue that the particular ways in which women perform their jobs should be seen at the intersection of their backgrounds in their country of origin, and their needs and expectations in the country of arrival. These perceptions must also be situated within an understanding of how closeness and family intimacy are generated. During my fieldwork in Barcelona, I became used to hearing the phrase, 'I'm like one of the family' (*Soy como de la familia*), when women were doing well in their job or had a positive memory of it.

This was how Aracely, 47 years old (see Appendix), referred to her job. She had been taking care of an elderly man for several years. Aracely assisted the man beginning at dinnertime, through bedtime and through breakfast the next morning. She helped him with personal hygiene: brushing his teeth, undressing, and reminding (and helping) him to take his medicines in the correct order. She also was available in case the man needed help during the night. The next day Aracely helped get him up from bed and prepared breakfast before she left. This meant that she had become accustomed to sleeping shorter periods at night and during the day at her home. In a way, Aracely's job was similar to that of Lupe's with the elderly lady, described at the beginning of the chapter. Their jobs required their dedication and devotion, including showing interest for the conversations they sustained with their clients. An experienced nurse, Lupe was the woman's personal assistant in her final years, taking care of her finances, budgeting, shopping, monitoring her medicines and blood pressure. Lupe also prepared the meals and looked after her so that she ate the right way and received the proper nutrition. She also did the laundry, cleaned the apartment, and took her out in the sun for her daily walk. Lupe and Aracely remarked that the most important aspect of their jobs was listening to the elderly and connecting themselves to the elderly's own families and the world around them.

In addition, Aracely referred to her job recurrently as: 'I help', 'I take care of' or 'I look after a man' (*Le ayudo, cuido o le atiendo a un señor*). 'They are like my family, you know, I have been close to him for so many years', she said, explaining that she and the elderly man

lived in different apartments in the same building. One time, when I was having a chat with her and her younger sister after the end of her working day, she suddenly disappeared for around 40 minutes to talk on the phone. When she came back, she stated that it was *el señor* [the man] who needed someone to talk to, and that she felt so close to him and his family. In cases of emergency, she could also ‘help him’ during her off hours, but for the most part, it was not necessary. What made the devoted attentiveness of this improvised care possible was the familial character of the job, and her desires to attend to and support the family where she worked. Years of daily contact had created these deep affective bonds, and the fact that they lived in the same building further contributed to these bonds.

The terms that encompass attentiveness and that women use to describe nursing care at their jobs and for their beloved ones (help, care for, attend to (*ayudar, cuidar, atender*) are the same at home and at work. They are the words that Aracely used in the introduction to this book, in reference to her sick son. Signifying intensive worries to be close to a beloved son, the concept of *atender* recurs in the context of caring at work, in hierarchical conditions where the worker occupies a lower social position. However, in signalling attentiveness, sacrifice and closeness, this term transforms into a mechanism that leads toward feelings of solidarity, and even an intense desire to imagine social equality at work. Aracely avoids the term ‘work’ to describe her activities and prefers family-related terms. In this way, the job sounds softer and gains a little higher status. Heavy routine tasks were described in kindly terms while emphasising the importance of treating the clients and to be treated by them as ‘being related,’ with trust, easy accessibility, availability and mutual help. For the women, a positively loaded relation to the employer was itself a motive to work harder and to further strengthen these relationships. In so doing, the intimacy and interdependence that characterises family and caring relations par excellence were constantly renewed at the workplace.

In the next section, I will describe how the literature about domestic care work treats family-related expressions and feelings involved at work.

Like a family

An early analysis of ‘family-like’ aspects of the employer-employee relation in domestic work in Latin America, and Peru in particular, is presented in an article by Grace Esther Young, entitled ‘The myth of being “like a daughter”’ (Young 1987). The domestic workers of this study were young poor indigenous rural women who had recently moved to the capital Lima, and who lived and worked in the growing sector of service to middle-class families (Young 1987).⁴⁰ ‘Like a daughter’ was the expression that *señoras* (housewives and employers) applied to their live-in domestic workers. The latter identified themselves as ‘daughters’ or ‘one of the family’, as Ecuadorians now do in Barcelona. This is an example of an earlier Marxist literature in which such expressions reflected an ideology where exploitation was hidden behind personal relationships. Young writes: ‘The definition of the domestic servant as “like a daughter” is part of the effort to secure her dependence and continual devotion to the family’ (1987:370). Other researchers have underscored the way in which domestic workers in Latin America have been called *hija*, *muchacha*, or *chica*, all meaning daughter or girl (cf. Chaney and Castro 1989). Scholars have frequently pointed to the exploitative force of the affective, family-like, and asymmetrical relations that prevail in domestic work, especially when the workers live in the residence of their employers (Anderson 1991, Chaney and Castro 1989, Radcliffe 1990, Romero 1992). In the context of women’s international migration, Parreñas summarises this point: ‘The perception of domestic workers “as one of the family” enforces, aggravates and perpetuates unequal relations of power between domestic workers and their employers’ (Parreñas 2001:180). From a different perspective, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001), in her study of Latinas in the United States, emphasises that what she calls ‘personalism’ (that is, affinity and personal connection) is not just an opportunity for the employer to exploit an employee, but can be seen in relation to the workers’ aspiration to feel respected in their jobs (2001:208). I suggest in this chapter that the family expressions and their meanings should be read in larger contexts in which migrants and the poor perceive their previous life circumstances as worse than

⁴⁰ The middle-class population in Latin America grew significantly during 1940-1970 (Young 1987).

living at a family-employer's home, like the Peruvian case studied by Young (1987).⁴¹ As such, these phrases filled with family affect can provide different kinds of interpretations for these women's lives in care.

In sum, scholars have made an enormous contribution to the analysis of personalised and affective working relationships as manifestations of a system in which unequal labour conditions remain hidden or overlooked. They have made visible these domestic workers and condemned their difficult life conditions. They have denounced these power relations, also pointing to a lack of authenticity and forms of alienation. Unfortunately, a world of emotions and experiences of intensive exchange among the individuals involved in the process has been overlooked. As Näre puts it, 'If we do not accept these statements [of family-likeness] as authentic descriptions of how the workers felt towards their employers or the person they cared for, we end up portraying migrants as dupes under false-consciousness' (Näre 2011:406). Earlier studies in particular gave little space to the ambiguous nature of the working relationship and the multiple daily considerations to be undertaken, which are at the very core of domestic care work. An analysis of caring relations requires looking at the shared spaces and the feelings people experience within them.

Following this point, I suggest that paid care does not automatically prevent the production of intimate ties. As observed during my fieldwork in Spain, even labour relations that presumably were 'in transition' toward a 'more professional' (which means more emotionally detached) way of working, where care solutions should be provided by the market, embraced processes of 'familiarisation'. As the concept of intimate labour illustrates: 'intimacy is created through labour relations' (Boris and Parreñas 2010). More importantly, we should not understand intimacy as strictly an epiphenomenon, but as a productive force in itself.

⁴¹ Young, in her study in Peru for instance, did not mention that poor rural Peruvians were being dramatically hit and expelled from their communities by the violence of military forces and the guerrilla *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) between 1980 and 1993. In these circumstances the poor running away from their homes could perhaps perceive a family in the city as their salvation and tried to adopt them or become adopted (for an interesting study on Shining Path see for example Degregori et al. 1996).

‘Deep alliances’

Care work shows individuals in their most intimate dependencies upon others. The elderly, their families, and the caregivers share spaces where institutions are absent or only partially present and where different voids meet and overlap. First, there are the migrant women who carry with them feelings of separation from their children, parents and the rest of their families left behind in the home country. Women describe that they miss their families as well as a lifestyle centred on an extended social network that include neighbours, clients, and friends. For instance, Celia, who came from the town I call La Victoria in Ecuador, shared an apartment in Barcelona with her son, daughter-in-law and a little grandson, plus a tenant who rented one of the rooms (see more information about Celia’s life in the Appendix). During the day, all of them were at work and the grandson was left in the kindergarten. She had only occasional jobs and due to this, a clear goal of returning to Ecuador. She said: ‘I don’t like this life, it is too lonely here, there are no people in the apartment, it is not like Ecuador, where people are coming and going during the day, just to have a chat’. She admitted the necessity of companionship, friends and neighbours, and spontaneous visits, like in her home country.

Before migration, Celia owned a small beauty parlour (*salón de belleza*) in Ecuador, which functioned as a meeting point for people around her. In contrast, she experienced her life in Barcelona as extremely isolated, despite the daily presence of her son and his family, and the fact that one of her brothers with his family lived nearby in Costa Brava, where she spent some weekends. A home-based shop in Ecuador meant that home was open for others to drop by, ‘if only for a chat’. At her business-home she did not feel isolated and could earn some money, a lifestyle perfectly adjusted to ideals of social life where economic and affective aspects intermingled. ‘I knew all people in my town without leaving my home’, another woman said, describing her small grocery shop at home as the heart of her social life.

Second, many elderly Spaniards experience feelings of alienation as society modernises. Those with time, energy and resources may participate in the family life of their adult children, helping with grandchildren’s care or subsidizing children’s lives with their

pensions—not uncommon in Spain, which is characterised by high rates of unemployment. The elderly live longer but do not always have good health. As time passes they need more assistance at home. Others are still able to spend leisure time, taking in the sun in the city parks and having a chat with neighbours and friends. But feelings of isolation do not only arise out of individuals' physical condition or daily routines of life, but from modern ideals that marginalise the elderly, where aging is often seen as a burden. On this point, I join scholars of care who argue that dependence, limits and vulnerability should be recognised as a normal way of life in contrast to the centrality often allowed to 'the myth of the independent autonomous person' (Tronto 2012).

Third, there are those who employ caregivers, often women—less frequently, men—about 50-60 years old, squeezed in the so-called 'sandwich generation' (Miller quoted in Borderías et al. 2011:42). They are the adult daughters of elderly parents and mothers to children, even with grandchildren, all in need of support. According to the Catholic Mediterranean tradition, women should care for their family members, but these are women who cannot or do not want to do it and have to pay for it. They are the generation of women who joined the labour market en masse when they were around 20-30 years old (Vega Solís 2009:30). The long working hours of Spaniards in general do not allow adults to attend to their elderly parents even if they might wish to do so. Time has become a scarce resource since men and women work outside home while the burdens of care in the household accumulate (Comas d'Argemir 2009:176). The care that used to be a family obligation (mostly for women) is today commonly purchased in the formal and informal labour market. This transaction is often negotiated and coordinated by an adult child of the person in need and involves the incorporation of a new family member: the migrant. These transactions illustrate the core of how individuals try to find alternatives to the care crisis, while society in general is increasingly dependent on what Ibarra calls 'deep alliances' (Ibarra 2010), strong ties produced between the elderly and their migrant caregivers profoundly engaged in the final years of the lives of the employers. In these cases, the adult children of these elderly also become involved in the 'deep alliances'.

In the next section I explore how Ecuadorians expect elderly parents to be treated, illuminating migrant women's engagement with their caring jobs in Spain, and how these understandings fashion labour relations in the country of arrival.

The elderly in Ecuador

Women caregivers' involvement with the elderly is not only encouraged by their urgent practical needs in Spain, but is also shaped by how elderly parents are regarded in Ecuador. An elderly parent in Ecuador is considered the crux of the 'united family' (see Chapter 3), who is a conduit for encounters between different generations and the reunion of dispersed family members. In Ecuador, it is not widely accepted to send an elderly parent to a nursing home (also called *ancianato*, *hogar de ancianos*). Aside from the limited number and high costs of nursing homes, this may easily be perceived as a form of abandonment, leaving the elderly outside the protection of family life.⁴² The few families that consider placing an aging parent in a nursing home in Ecuador can surely count on internal conflicts. Families with resources will pay assistants at home, while others with scarce resources may engage their own unemployed relative, someone who works with a home-based business, or simply, someone who has time. In one observed case, three siblings were struggling with each other. Two wanted to keep the elderly mother at home and pay someone to take care of her, while the third suggested placing the mother in a nursing home. The latter proposal was regarded as heartless by the other siblings, and the discussions produced serious ruptures between them. In the end, the elderly mother, who had problems walking and who regularly attended physical therapy sessions, convinced the siblings to agree to send her to a nursing home, where she said she would feel good and be well-attended by professionals the whole day.

The migrant caregivers commented to me on the 'good arrangements' in Spain, where the old parents remain at home with personal assistants who care for them. This model is also positively perceived in Ecuador when the children leave home, and when the elderly parents for different reasons cannot move between the homes of different children. The positive attitude that women have to care work in Spain is thus not only about earning an income from working with the elderly people, but also relates to the assumed respect and love that the elderly deserve, what they perceive as valuable work, and

⁴² Furthermore, abandoning an elderly is considered a crime according to the Ecuadorian law. In Ecuador the *Código civil* and the *Código de la Niñez y Adolescencia* establish the obligation of children to take care of their elderly parents.

how they think elderly people's lives must end: surrounded by family. The absence of a daughter or a son when a parent dies is difficult to accept among Ecuadorians. Moreover, a common expression of disgust or disagreement with the country of arrival relates to how 'the younger do not respect the elderly'. In Ecuador (and among Ecuadorian migrants in Spain), to care for an aging person is thus much more valued than cleaning, especially when a person had left behind her own elderly parents in need of company and attention. 'When they have given us so much, life itself, why would we not do the same for them?' This is a familiar sentiment among Ecuadorian women, not only in relation to their own relatives and family duties, but also in relation to the elderly they care for in Spain.

When women work in elderly care in Spain they have usually already worked as cleaners—which many continue to do on the side or in their 'free time'. The upward mobility implied in being a caregiver facilitates the daily management of their identification with their jobs. Care work involves both physically and psychologically strenuous tasks, but it also allows a kind of heightened self-valuation when people avoid saying '*soy una empleada doméstica*' ('I'm a domestic worker') or '*trabajo limpiando*' ('I'm a cleaner'). Direct identifications with cleaning and domestic work represent an even lower status than being a caregiver. In my interviews and chats with migrants, cleaning was often hidden behind phrases like 'I'm doing some hours' (*unas horitas*). Working with the elderly helps women feel better in their devalued jobs, and consequently, they will do even more for their employers. In many cases, these jobs remain positive experiences, as for Aracely or Lupe, who saw their principles of commitment and solidarity with their employers as central to themselves.

Expertise and sacrifice for the family

Because of the urgent need for caregivers in Spain, the migrant women's need for income and permanent residence, and the assumed respect and devotion that the elderly deserve in Ecuador, it is understandable that women dedicate extra attentiveness to their dependents. Women claimed that in response to their attentive care, the elderly whom they nursed became accustomed to them, saw them

as family members, and even loved them. Expressions that caregivers often heard from employers, such as, ‘nobody has done for me what you do’, were seen as illustrative of these affects. Other migrant women use family expressions when describing that they performed their jobs as a form of ‘sacrifice’, as when they ‘sacrifice for the family’. Their descriptions of sacrifice, giving their best, and ‘more than required’, must be read in three dimensions: in order to sustain their own left-behind families, to get out of the hardships of being an unknown migrant, and to assist the lonely elderly in need ‘who deserve help and respect’. Feelings of compassion and solidarity represent the women’s dedication to these new families in the country of arrival.

The idiom of sacrifice ‘for the family’ has become the way for migrants to describe their lives and journeys, and how they portray their separation from families. As scholars have noticed, even the official government discourse in Ecuador ‘celebrates the worthy self-sacrifice of emigrants’ (Boccagni and Lagomarsino 2011:290). Individuals’ involvement in caring jobs and cleaning in the country of arrival was also seen as a sacrifice, something they ‘would never have done if being in their own country’, as put by Emperatriz, another woman in her sixties working some hours as cleaner and caregiver (see more details about Emperatriz’s life in the Appendix). Associating their migrant trajectories with sacrifice, they did whatever was necessary. For example, they did not care about the formal schedule if more work was needed in a given situation. They could work overtime (*horas extras*) to cook a particularly good meal, to make time to talk and listen, and to clean the house. They would help their hosts take a bath, choose clothes, brush their hair or encourage them and take them for a walk. Many of these tasks were not formally included in their regular duties. A case in point was Jessica, a returnee in her forties who originally had graduated as schoolteacher and had worked as an office assistant (*contadora*) in a big chain of food markets in Ecuador before migration. Living again in Ecuador, she described her work in Barcelona as follows:

‘My work schedule was expected to be from 10:00 to 14:00. *La señora* [her boss] was very satisfied (*contentísima*) with me because I cooked my own food [*mi comida*, she refers to food made in an Ecuadorian style, with many spices and ‘not only salt and pepper’]. I did not simply open cans and throw the food in the frying pan to be warmed. I cooked actual food. I seasoned the steak

thoroughly with garlic, salt, cumin. Oooh, how those people loved me! (*Los tenía enamoradísimos*). When I cooked the chicken as we do here [in Ecuador], they wanted me to prepare it every day, especially when they had invited friends.⁴³ *La chica* (the girl) who worked there before me said: “Don’t complicate things for yourself, make it easy.” [But] I made everything spotlessly clean (*limpiécito, brillando*) and never went home at 14:00 but at 15:00 or 15:30. *La señora* did not bother me (*no era molestosa*). I felt at home. She was not stingy (*no era mezquina*). She always told me to eat from their food and encouraged me to drink juice or whatever I wished [...]’ (Jessica, 2008, interviewed in Guayaquil).

At the time of this job Jessica was waiting for her husband to join her in Barcelona, as it was their plan from the beginning of her migration. Her work with the family she mentioned above was cooking and cleaning the floors, the toilets and the kitchen, but she also did the laundry, ironed the clothes and took care of the flowers on the balcony. In particular, she carefully planned which of her many ‘specialised recipes’ she could prepare the next day in order to satisfy the family, which greatly appreciated it. According to Jessica her aim was to ‘make the family dependent on her delicious food’. She said it was a half-time job but that she remained there because she felt good. It was sometimes better than to go to her place, a little room shared with acquaintances.

In the construction of these relations charged with affect and intimacy, Jessica highlighted the significance of the employer sharing beverages and food—but surely not the table—while she cooked in a defined style. The generosity and openness toward the other who was a newcomer led to a series of extra services and favours in return. Cooking should not be simple, but ‘Ecuadorian style’, the time-consuming elaborate meals along with extra hours at work, always doing more than was formally agreed. This was the way in which Jessica became part of the family, with knowledge, experience and sacrifice. The kind-hearted employer had provided acceptance, documents and a regular income. Jessica’s committed attitude constituted her reciprocity to this generosity. In this giving and receiving the participants formed a circle of kindness, the circle of the

⁴³ I found similar stories among men who described their construction work, painting, etc. They always did more than was required to make people happy and to continue to get new jobs, they said.

gift (Mauss 1990 [1950]). Jessica expected that this would continuously be repeated.

Jessica did not worry about unpaid overtime as long as she had harmonious relationships with her employers. She was also pregnant at the time, but this did not bother the employer, who she found very sympathetic. Her boss had asked her to stay and work after giving birth, and had proposed that she put her baby at the nearby day-care centre when Jessica decided it was time to do so. Doing that, she could continue to work there. She said she did not accept it in the end, because her husband was on the way from Ecuador to support her and the baby. Her case reveals once again that when employers are perceived as generous (*no mezquina*), the domestic helpers feel dedication. In her own view, they offered each other an authentic 'family experience', with gifts of time, full of solidarity, 'like an actual family' (*como una familia de verdad!*).

Women accepted their sacrifices as necessary because it was critical to get a job, a work contract and a residence permit.⁴⁴ To circulate between different jobs was indispensable until the women found the right employer who treated them with respect and generosity. Some jobs that did not offer enough support to get regular status or where the salaries were extremely low were assumed simply as a means of earning some money during a short time. As soon as they could they left that job for another. Before the crisis 2008 jobs had been abundant and Ecuadorian women could choose the better option, but by the time I met them, this was hardly the case.

From another perspective, there was a kind of shame in doing only domestic and cleaning work, and this was hidden or left unnamed. When cleaners did not describe their jobs in terms of family expressions or sacrifice, they frequently mentioned only the name of the company where they cleaned. For example: 'I work at a nursing home', 'at *Feria* of Barcelona', 'at a *locutorio*' (cybercafé), 'at a Revlon boutique'. In this way, they allowed for free interpretation of their activity. By using the expression 'like a family' or leaving the

⁴⁴ They could also marry a Spanish citizen in order to obtain a residence permit. Most migrants avoided this option because they believed that in so doing, they would not be allowed to work and would then remain dependent on the spouse or they would have to turn their lives wholly into the informal economy. In recent years the law allows those who have been reunited with family members to work, but only for a defined time and in certain kinds of jobs, concretely, domestic care work. This regulation leads migrant women to continue in domestic care work, independent of their level of education and previous professional experience.

name of the task unspoken, they pushed aside shameful feelings and could even feel proud of their occupations. They frequently reminded me of their pride as hard workers, expressed in phrases like: ‘I’ve done everything here, except prostitution or stealing’. Moral principles reflected in having been involved in the ‘right ways of working’ were important to mention. ‘No sex work, no theft’ were reinforced ideas, especially in this point in which the younger migrant women could easily associate with prostitution. In order to describe their jobs as a form of betterment, and ‘worth the sacrifice’, Ecuadorians emphasised instead the technical and professional nature of their occupations. This was associated with the use of more specialised machines to clean big places or for the case of caring jobs, machines to lift patients. Mostly, caregivers wanted others to value their work as a profession, but a profession with ‘a personal touch’.

Pepe and Gloria (see the Appendix) often insisted on the quality of their work as care assistants. ‘We are geriatric assistants’, they said, correcting me in an interview. They elaborated, ‘because we’ve trained to do it, we’ve attended many courses in geriatric care, which distinguishes us from others’. Gloria emphasised the extra psychological assistance she devoted to a depressed woman she took care of: ‘I helped her, listened, advised her to “go out”, I said to her, “meet your friends, don’t stay at home, you cannot revive your dead mother by thinking of her full-time”—because, you know Gladis, when you have studied and have a little better education, then you can give better advice too’.⁴⁵ After attending many courses on health care Gloria and Pepe thought that what made their work special was giving the elderly more attentiveness in form of time, patience, conversation, encouragement, and not establishing more distance. In the end, while certain forms of expertise, knowledge and professional service are valued among caregivers such as Pepe and Gloria, they especially recognised that intimacy was the key aspect of their jobs, coinciding with the concept of ‘intimate labour’ (Boris and Parreñas 2010). They knew they sold a special product where expertise was mixed with genuine affect and support. From their perspective, professionalisation did not consist of simply a specialisation of technologies of care, or of strictly keeping a distance with their clients, but in adding an affective, intimate touch to their jobs.⁴⁶ This became especially

⁴⁵ Gloria had studied to be a high school philosophy and social science teacher in Ecuador without pursuing this career.

⁴⁶ While migrants’ desires to be professional show their interest in doing a good job, creating personal bonds, feeling respected and trusted and economically compensated for this job,

evident when they criticised the failures of other assistants who ‘had no time to talk’.

Managing the authentic family experience

The display of affect and these new familial connections in the context of work cannot be read as simple economic transactions or issues of pure interest without taking into account the deep beliefs that entail a family commitment. The Ecuadorian caregivers in Spain became emotionally linked to their generous employers and to the elderly who lived alone and who purchased care and help at home. Recall the alliance that Lupe formed with the mother of the doctor, and the doctor herself. The women were the assistants of the elderly and his or her family; the quality of life of aged people as well as the opportunity for others to go to work depended on them. The needs of the elderly people do not only create jobs but also a dynamic that allows caregiver women to feel professional and in some sense superior as care providers who could do their jobs much ‘better than others’, a feeling that they in turn needed in order to build the foundation of their dignity as workers. It even gives the working women a sense of control that they do not want to lose (Vega Solis 2009:35), this being perhaps their only space of control.

Lupe described the support she had given to the doctor when her mother died, helping to clean the elderly lady’s house, and ‘being there’ psychologically, listening to her. So, Lupe worked with the elderly lady and her daughter. One day when we had decided to meet for a meal at her place, she was waiting for her partner in the street. She told me that he had gone in a truck to pick up some furniture that have been donated by the family of an elderly person she knew but that had died recently. In another story, Emperatriz, in her middle sixties, described the strength she gave a sick woman younger than herself, who needed help in daily tasks and also when she was lonely

discussions on professionalization or formalisation of domestic care work imply such things as changing nomenclature (from domestic service to housekeeping), better payments and labour conditions, and importantly, creating distance from the private intimate sphere of personal relationships that is most associated with the family. For a critique, see Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, who discusses domestic care work’s dilemmas in terms of human rights, social affective bonds, solidarity and ethics of responsibility (2010).

and depressed (for details about Emperatriz's life see the Appendix). 'She didn't want to go out! I bathed her and pushed her to wear a nice outfit. I challenged her: "Tomorrow I want to hear that you have not stayed at home suffering, ok?"' These actively engaged caregivers each felt empowered by the fact that they were caring for an employer family that needed them while also supporting their families in Ecuador.

In this complex daily life of caring work, the exchanges of advice, objects and gifts (like crucifixes and furniture), physical work, knowledge, experience and sacrifices were encouraged. Women gladly entered these cycles of obligatory returns of gifts. The women found an affective compensation through being useful in helping others. Caregiving created a space of intimate connection that expanded possibilities for family and social life. Such experiences of proximity were reported from caregivers in daily contact at the elderly's home, and stood in contrast to the alienating situation in nursing centres where women said that the job was extremely stressful and did not leave time to have a chat or to help the elderly in more personalised ways. Though she earned more, Jessica described her job in a nursing home—which she had found after she left the job in domestic service mentioned above—as meaningless and one reason to return to Ecuador: 'I was there [in Barcelona] working like a donkey, just to pay the bills at the end of every month'.

What is made visible by the examples presented here is that affective bonds are not excluded when care is purchased. Rather, feelings continue to be important for functioning dynamics among the people involved in domestic care work. Especially important is a form of 'bounded authenticity' (Bernstein 2010) in which commercial transactions do not mean that affection and emotions are eliminated, but rather become delineated and packaged in different way. In a study by Bernstein, sex workers sell 'the girlfriend experience', an 'authentic affective connection' (2010). Caring workers also have a unique product to sell. That is the experience of the close affectionate relative who genuinely engages in attending to a parent. People looking for somebody to care for their elderly parent often search for someone who is trustworthy and able to construct closeness. This is the role the migrant worker takes. A caregiver offers family commitment, attentiveness and genuine affect added to her knowledge and lengthy life experience of caring for others in another society.

Domestic service from Ecuador to Spain

Although of significance to the lives of great numbers of families and to the country's economy, domestic service in Ecuador has not occupied much scholarly attention (but see Radcliffe 1999, Abbots 2012, Casanova 2013). A devalued occupation, domestic work is a common source of employment for women. Even lower-middle-class households can afford to buy domestic assistance at home. Migrant women explained that their 'helpers' (*empleadas*) were often poor relatives (or god-daughter) or poor women from the town or barrio, whom they had to help back with gifts or favours. For other women with small children in Ecuador, working out of the home domestic service is primarily a necessity rather than a symbol of social status.⁴⁷

When the migrant women came to Barcelona, they already had experiences of dealing with relations between domestic workers and employers in similar familial terms. As in Spain, such relationships in Ecuador are complex and ambivalent, and can become positively charged, as both are obliged to contribute to the construction of harmony as is typical in patron-client ties. A domestic worker can to a certain extent expect help and support that exceeds or 'completes' the expected salary if she offers loyalty and works hard over a long period.

In a hierarchical society like Ecuador, clerical jobs (*detrás de un escritorio*) are held in high esteem, while occupations in which 'one's hands get dirty' are devalued and left to poor men and women with lower education and social status. Ecuadorians in Spain could feel shame doing cleaning and caring jobs, but they also said, 'in another country you can take any job', but that is not the case 'in your own country'. Yet simultaneously they felt obliged to construct pride around these jobs. When women do 'dirty work' in Barcelona, but

⁴⁷ Domestic service will probably change in the future, since legal changes of the Ecuadorian Labour Code establish the obligation of the employer to pay the minimum salary to domestic workers and to affiliate them to the national social security (this will become around 450 US dollars per month). These changes will surely influence the middle classes, who already complain about the impossibility to buy domestic help as before. At least until these reforms are implemented in practice, most people will be able to afford domestic help at different prices, especially so middle and upper classes. As an example of the effects of the latest changes, Casanova (2013) quotes the case of employers in Guayaquil who, expecting the visit of the work inspector (who represents the National Labour Office), gave a day off to their domestic helpers, or told the authorities that the employee was a family member, protecting themselves in this way from being taken to the court and from paying expensive compensation.

describe their jobs as family relationships, they give their activities an elevated value by charging them with positive meanings. In particular, the force of describing themselves in terms of family expressions, their desires to become a family, offered a connotation of loyalty and reciprocity, transforming care workers into potentially employable individuals who others could recommend and take into their homes like one more family member. This recognition was a kind of certification that they were trustworthy and responsible professionals. Employers on their part preferred to keep the same employees if they had achieved a sense of mutuality. Once this matching happened, domestic workers could gain some advantages. For example, when they took long holidays to visit their home country, they could hand over their work to any person of their own choice as a substitute, often a close friend or a relative, hoping to get the job back in return. Being conscious of the permanent risk of losing their jobs, they also had the hope that special favours to fellow migrants would strengthen their own social networks in the city.

Mutual affect and needs rather than employment contracts are at the base of labour relations. ‘Trust instead of contracts’, as Lutz states (2011:80). If there is a conflict, the migrant woman may have to leave the job and go a few years without legal status, an undesirable situation in which migrants cannot plan their lives. As a consequence, searching for a job is for a migrant marked by a longing to find the right employer, a generous family, who will treat the employee as an individual, giving respect, closeness, trust, and of course, paying the salary in time and allowing the residence permit—the best of the gifts. Only then can a new family be formed, the relationship prolonged, and the experience remembered as positive.

However, it is necessary to account for how these new families drew their own boundaries. Miller (2007) asks with scepticism about the new theories of kinship: is it really all about negotiation, flexibility and experience? In my own study, I never witnessed domestic helpers receiving an inheritance when an elderly client passed away. What frequently happened was that women received old furniture, paintings, crucifixes, things that in selling or renovating the apartments were literally cast in the garbage, as seen weekly in the streets of Barcelona at the time of my fieldwork. Surely, migrant women received things that otherwise would be dumped in the rubbish or that nobody else in the family wanted to keep, or maybe the gifts were offerings that the elderly had personally decided to give to their assistants. What I have seen during fieldwork and through women’s stories is that they came

to transform those items into valuable and nostalgic objects. It is thus noteworthy to remind ourselves the difficulties we get in trying to separate the material from the immaterial while exploring the meanings that caregivers construct around their jobs in these hierarchical situations, or what the material items mean in caring relations. As Miller (2005) observes, ‘humans are formed to an extraordinary degree by their expressions of immaterial ideals through material forms’.⁴⁸

The employer in this relation characterised by exchanges of gifts and favours may get more services than agreed on without additional payment, as the proponents of the so-called ‘prisoner of love’ analytical framework for care work have observed (see England 2005). Yet the employees could also get benefits to which they aspire, if they succeed in establishing a harmonious working relationship despite the structural inequalities. In addition to assistance in obtaining a legal work permit, they could be helped to reunite with a child, obtain furniture they lack, or establish important contacts to find housing or a new job. Sometimes these new family relations are transitory experiences that do not last beyond the moment in which ‘life gives better opportunities’. When I interviewed Jessica in Ecuador, we sat in her living room in front of a big crucifix that dominated a wall of her newly built house in Guayaquil. She recalled the kind family from whom she had received it. For her it was a memory of past times. She remained in Ecuador indefinitely, ‘no more sacrifices, no more donkey job’ (*trabajo de burros*), she said, referring to the high-pressure jobs she had later found in nursing homes in Barcelona.

At other times, the exchanges of favours, gifts, and extra work hours prolonged these relations for the coming years. Lupe, through her employer, *la doctora*, had the opportunity to become part of the team of professional nurses in the local hospital, which she proudly told me coordinates 19 laboratories. She gladly described how one day, on Kings’ Day (*en día de reyes*), the doctor had given her a present, a letter from the hospital inviting her for an employment interview. Since then, she has been working at the hospital. Although Lupe got this more favourable job, she continued to work for many years as a cleaner at *la doctora*’s home—perhaps she got an extra

⁴⁸ For a comprehensive discussion on studies on materiality and material ambiguity, see Leivestad (2015). In this study I am most concerned with the material in relation to the theoretical discussion of love and money, as lenses to observe the embeddedness of care and migration.

income, perhaps she ‘only helped’ her busy but kind-hearted doctor. Lupe also had found a way to amass a higher income by leasing the rooms of her new apartment to some tenants. Flexibility was the word to describe Lupe’s capacity to create and retain various options for income at the same time. Staying on with the doctor reflected Lupe’s assumed moral indebtedness, friendship, gratitude and loyalty, but it also revealed that even ‘better jobs’ (i.e., as nurses and care workers) in which migrant women were involved, were often poorly paid, while new costly needs constantly arose, especially for those who wanted to reunite with their children. Her ties to her doctor employer helped her ameliorate her situation. Lupe said, ‘Yes, I need a little more [money] now that my daughter will come, and *la doctora* has been so kind to me, I won’t leave her!’

The persistence of the family

This chapter has dealt with the fuzzy boundaries between work and family, affect and market, showing how women experience and manage social distance, balancing economy and intimacy through filling their jobs with family feelings. The topics have thrown light on the contemporary reorganisation of care in Spain and on the roles that Ecuadorian women have come to play within it. In a few words, the Spanish care system continues to rest on family ideals, and in a great part patron-client ties in which loyalties and permanent exchanges of favours and gifts of different forms remain an organising principle of labour relations. As we have seen, this system has replaced local female family members with migrant women, though grandmothers still play a great role in childcare (Tobio 2012a). The Ecuadorian migrant caregivers perform their work with ideals of family commitment and sacrifice, and they engage in caregiving beyond what is formally required, in order to support the elderly, and the families of these elderly. Moreover, the care labour market in Spain would not function without the enormous efforts that caregiving women invest not only in their jobs, but also in filling these jobs with value and pride, a necessary process in adjusting to the unequal global distribution of wellness in which their social status has been downgraded. They have, ironically, descended the labour hierarchy to access a better income (Gratton 2007).

Drawing attention to the intermingling of economic and affective transactions, this chapter has also described the ambiguities of how women feel and represent themselves, sometimes with shame or sacrifice, other times with dignity and as proud professionals. Notions of intimate labour became important to illuminate the intensive production of family ties at work, the production of ‘the authentic family experience’, which in turn idealises the family itself as the superior source of care. It was not specific daily performances at work—which I could not observe directly very often—that was in question here, but how women constructed their accounts, interpreted their jobs and labour conditions, putting themselves in tune with local families in their particular experiences of the current care crisis.

In sum, an analysis of the re-creation of social relations and affective bonds at work has shown that the family expressions that women use are key issues in making sense of their lives in a new environment in which they recognise both their disadvantages and a few opportunities to escape a precarious life without legal permits. Women apply family expressions for their new affective connections in order to, first, create a sense of dignity, and, second, because they fit cultural expectations concerning work and family hierarchies in Ecuador, and, third, because of the practical needs of getting legal status, earning an income and fulfilling hopes for social mobility. Finally, taking the family expressions seriously as an analytical starting point allows us to go beyond a strict focus on the exploitative aspects of the jobs. Instead, we observe how people at the margins of society inevitably become involved in emotive relationships in their search for better life chances. Moreover, the family-related talk allows us to analyse women's globalised lifestyles and how emotions and financial transactions interact with the limitations structured by migration law and welfare.

Migrants and locals live in relations of interdependence and cycles of gift exchange. They must jointly respond to the deficiency of public welfare services, find individual private alternatives based on reciprocal but highly asymmetrical exchanges by organising care in a mode in which it continues to be female, underpaid, precarious, invisible and marginal. These kinds of labour relations remain in the patron-client model as long as migrants do not get their legal statuses, and even beyond that. Among the research respondents, Lupe had reached the best position in the local labour market. Yet, as the examples of Aracely and Lupe reveal, after they had gotten their ‘papers’, they remained, at least in part, in their domestic care jobs,

morally indebted to their adopted families. As observed in this chapter, daily hands-on care re-creates family intimacy, thus illustrating that families are broad flexible entities open to transformations in relation to political-economic factors, and particular social and cultural expectations. Mostly, an idealised family predominates along the market relations. The fact that women get their papers or elderly clients die cannot necessarily be read as the end of these relations, as in the case of Lupe. It was different for Jessica, who, once she gave birth and was reunited with her husband, ‘left behind’ the kind-hearted family of her employers.

In general, the contours that define family life develop in the dynamic of care. It is the daily caring for each other that makes kinship, family and groups (Leinaweaver 2010, Borneman 2001, Weismantel 1995). Boundaries are mobile, flexible, and may adjust to the situation, but when too much elasticity is required from one side without corresponding reciprocal obligations—for instance, when employers or employees require more than they give—the family ties will not take form or will vanish. We do not see cases of this kind in this chapter because the women delighted in remembering what was positive, and my idea with this chapter has been—beyond providing an alternative portrait of care as labour through the experiences of Ecuadorians female caregivers in Barcelona—to recognise the co-existence of economic and affective transactions, and to remind us of the intricacies involved in trying to create fixed differences between market and family relations, as well as between biologically and socially acquired families.

In sum, this chapter has shown the persistence of the family in remaking itself while fashioning market relations. Having shown the fuzzy territory of family and work, and how markets remain ‘familiarised’, I will now describe how this family works as an ‘infrastructure of care’ that has the force to transgress social distance and navigate uncertain relations marked by long-term absence.⁴⁹ What

⁴⁹ I briefly mention here the term ‘infrastructure’ as close to what we use to say about ideological issues; ‘it is there but is invisible, taken-for-granted, when it functions, you stop seeing it’ (Star quoted in Wilson 2016:248), as it often happens with care. In studies of migration, Xiang and Lindquist (2014) see migration infrastructure as ‘systematically interlinked technologies, institutions and actors that facilitate and condition mobility’. I do not develop this topic in this study but infrastructure can more adequately communicate a comprehensive idea of the variety of components that are the basis of caring relations. The idea of care in this study includes things and deep feelings, the relations between both, as well as the forces of migration regimes, family structures and labour markets in fashioning caring relations.

is the force of this family form? The next chapter is about how migrants expand their social networks and attempt to integrate them into the same ideal 'united family' described in this chapter. It introduces the family practices of attentiveness, sacrifices and social networking necessary to sustain lives at home, abroad and in between.

CHAPTER 3 | CONNECTED PEOPLE

Commitments, attentiveness and sacrifices

One day in the summer of 2007 in the barrio Via Bella, just outside Barcelona, I met Mayra, a well-dressed and energetic woman in her early thirties (see the Appendix for more details about Mayra's life). Born in the Ecuadorian southern Andes, she had been living and studying in Guayaquil, and working in Colombia before moving to Barcelona. Unlike Lupe and Aracely (introduced in the previous chapters), Mayra had not migrated with a clear goal of supporting her family, but to escape from a broken love relationship. Now, she was in the centre of a group excitedly chatting about the day's big event, a special rally in which the newly elected president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, had come to greet his compatriots in a talk that emphasised return to the home country, solidarity, and migrants as victims of the 'long neoliberal night', which would come to an end under his government. Mayra had jumped to the scene eager to hug and have a picture taken with the president.

Mayra was trained as an accountant but working from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. as a cleaner in one of Barcelona's biggest conference centres. Thanks to her entrepreneurialism and many contacts, she also occasionally cleaned a *locutorio* (cyber café), worked as cashier at a local grocery shop, and every year accompanied a Spanish family to their summer house. Mayra also sustained a business of direct sales of Yanbal—a brand of cosmetics, jewellery, perfumes and toiletry products—contacting clients and approaching possible sellers, while fighting to obtain the corresponding payments in time. Her network of friends, clients, and acquaintances was broad, and so it was always an ongoing process. Like other women, she saw herself as *amiguera* (very sociable). Having people around was her way of life, but she recognised that her most important commitment was attending to her husband and two-year-old son. She would hurry home to cook dinner for her husband and struggled to find someone to help with childcare in order to keep up her hard-working life. Especially important was

the presence of two younger sisters who shared her apartment in Via Bella. Together, the three sisters paid for the education of their siblings who remained behind in Ecuador; including their brother at the Guayaquil Maritime Academy. But their siblings also expected other kinds of support. Generally exonerated from regularly sending remittances since she had her ‘own family obligations’—a husband and child—or perhaps because her two single sisters were already acting as family providers, Mayra sometimes sent a big suitcase with clothes and shoes with a friend travelling to Ecuador, or as a package with Iberia Airlines.

Struggling with time limitations, frustrations and ambitions, Mayra planned to build a house in Ecuador for herself, which could be a refuge from her hectic life and her feelings that her marriage was at risk. Sometimes, she thought of returning and, at other times, of simply saving some money by investment in the house. Over time, Mayra, her family, friends and her Yanbal network, came to constitute a significant source of information during my fieldwork in Via Bella. She gave me access to her family, friends and acquaintances, and made new social ties to support me in my own search for connections. She often introduced me as her new friend who was writing a book about Ecuadorians, as I myself had described my work to her.

Moving back and forth between Ecuador and Barcelona, this chapter draws on women’s intensive social networking in order to ask questions about the creation and maintenance of flexible social constellations through which care is mobilised. As presented in the introduction, care is not simply a commodity that travels from one place to another, creating ‘deficits and surpluses’ (Hochschild 2002). It also can be seen in relation to practical and moral commitments for the reproduction of well-being and for the formation of social dynamics that expand life possibilities. Being sociable, *amigueras*, allows women to find jobs, housing, childcare, and information. To create and keep these social connections requires significant time and effort, not only at work, as we saw in the last chapter with Lupe, but also in regard to family and friends, clients, and neighbours.

While in the previous chapter family relations expanded ‘vertically’ in the social hierarchy, in the present chapter, people pursue ‘lateral’ social connections in terms of making friends (*amigas*) with others in similar social status. This ‘equality’ is instable, however, especially in relation to migration, as there are ongoing processes of social differentiation. Individuals in general made enormous efforts to weave together social networks as they struggled with expectations and their

feelings of being in debt, while they also enjoyed the benefits of becoming connected. Many of these social connections are what Wolf called ‘instrumental friendship’ (2001 [1966]). From the categorization of ‘instrumental’, however, it should not be assumed that, as Wolf asserts, people may have entered these ties just in order to get access to resources or connections, ‘but the striving for such access will become vital in it’ (2001 [1966]: 177), while ‘a minimal element of affect remains important’ (Ibid.).

More generally, this chapter attempts to describe how ‘vertical’ and ‘lateral’ relationships should be understood as grounded on similar forms of social relationships centred on culturally specific understandings of the ‘united family.’ Feelings of commitment (called *compromiso*) and practices of attentiveness (associated with caring for, helping, attending to), often described as sacrifices ‘for the sake of the family’ (*sacrificios*), are key to understanding how individuals connect to each other, connections that create possibilities for providing and receiving care. Social relations in general are activated in the dynamic of debt and obligations, characterised by what Olwig observes in the Caribbean as ‘mutual relations of rights (to receive) and obligations (to give)’ (2007:167). Feelings of being in debt coexist with expectations of return (Mauss 1990 [1950]). Criticising the moral binary associated with debt and credit, Peebles states that they should be seen as an ‘inseparable unit,’ that is ‘productive of social ties, allegiances, enmities and hostilities’ (Peebles 2010).

Debt and feelings of being in debt are not negative facts but active forms of social life. Moral responsibilities motivated by debts and expectation and expressed as commitments, attentiveness and sacrifice are at the core of this chapter since they form basic conceptions of love and care, and the important support expected from one’s social networks. They also may impose tension in social relations as they create access and hopes of access to new resources.

To elaborate on this in ethnographic terms this chapter draws on the stories of Mayra, Marta and Gloria (see the Appendix). Mayra’s case illustrates an active process of social networking with friends and sisters in Barcelona, but for her, attentiveness and commitment were most concentrated on her obligations to her husband and son. Marta, constantly creating and sustaining social ties in Ecuador, provides an example of issues of attentiveness among the tensions and desires of being in both sides. Gloria, with her pending commitment to family reunification and the material house, shows profound feelings about

being in debt. Her story shows a concrete aspect of care, the material house, as well as the importance of a shared narrative or project as the main dimensions of care in transnational families. As we will see in this chapter, the house built through migrant remittances in Ecuador is the most potent symbol of the migration process and allows us to consider how expectations, hope, and debt become concentrated in a particular material process that reflects the long-term social networks of care.

I start with a brief description of the ideal Ecuadorian ‘united family’ (*la familia unida*), the reasons for migration and their searches for a better life. In the section below, I discuss the way the family operates through spontaneity, improvisation, support and obligation.

The united family

Although European and North American-based scholars of the Andean region have studied gender, couples and families, they have done so mainly in the rural areas of the highlands,⁵⁰ rather than in urban and lowland areas.⁵¹ In this section I describe how my largely urban lowland research respondents understand the tensions between a desired ideal nuclear family, and their concrete daily needs of care and support from extended social networks. The nuclear family remains an important symbol, but daily life reveals ample variation, not least through the fact that ‘family relations are not built upon identical rights and duties, but upon reciprocal rights and duties . . . ’ (Weismantel 1988: 26). The women in my study believe that within their families, different members are expected to contribute not only according to gendered and generational conventions, but also

⁵⁰ Scholars of Andean region have discussed families in indigenous groups of the rural areas (c.f. Harris 1978, Weismantel 1988). They have, for instance, analysed the symbolic ideals of ‘the married couple as complementary unity’ (Harris 1978, 1980), as well as the hierarchies that characterise spouses’ relationships (Harris 1978, 1994, Harvey 1994). They have also recognised the importance of ‘two-head households’, and of men and women contributing economically (Hamilton 1998). Weismantel has studied the family in terms of processes of ‘making kin’ (1995), and from the symbolic and material aspects of gender, poverty and the power of women in the kitchen (1988).

⁵¹ This is particularly the case regarding gender relations in coastal Ecuador (Herrera 2001), though there are exceptions, for example, Moser 2009, Radcliffe and Pequeño 2010, Casanova 2011, 2013, Friederic 2014, Andrade 2014.

according to their particular abilities.

La familia unida (the united family), which consists of parents, children and siblings, is considered important to achieve and sustain through time. This generally involves the support of children, the elderly, and the ill, as well as the maintenance of an organised clean house. Spontaneity, improvisation and attentiveness are also crucial in defining and shaping daily family relations; something migrants recurrently comment on when they encounter a European society where everything appears to be organised and planned.

A single adult without children—particularly a woman but also a man—is generally considered outside the normal parameters, because, it is said, ‘people must have company’. Children are frequently described as a parent’s companion. ‘How is your little companion doing?’ (*Como está tu compañerita?*), or ‘Your new little companion will make you stronger!’ (*Tu compañerita te dará fuerzas!*), are common greetings among women with their babies. Spouses are considered important to sustain the reputation of the accompanied woman and ‘well raised’ children, and it is often hoped that a woman would meet ‘a good man who supports his family economically’. Elderly parents, especially the elderly mother, are considered a central symbol of unity, a meeting point over time replaced by the women of the next generation.

For Ecuadorians, the term family (*familia*) may include distant family members. Associations with close or faraway (*lejanos y cercanos*) family members are mostly described in relation to daily interaction, or if they can be a source of support in case of need. More than that, in the coastal lowlands, in rural areas and small towns, poor men still greet others on the streets by simply yelling, ‘*Familiaaaa!!!*’, expanding a sense of family toward a whole town. Another form of address to each other in urban and rural coast areas—even in the highlands—is *ñaños* and *ñañas* (brothers and sisters), in daily conversation with friends, acquaintances and with actual siblings (see also Meñaca, unpublished). In practice, Ecuadorians often live in close connection with an extended network of cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, and sisters- and brothers-in-law. Friends may also be welcomed and incorporated into the world of family celebrations and special meetings. Not infrequently, those groups recognised as *familia* will include a friend—adult or child—who is frequently present during meals and conversations. Ideally, to be a family (*ser familia*) means caring for each other, helping, cooking together, coming for unannounced visits, and being there in case of need. In daily life,

sharing food when a friend visits is compulsory, and conversations often happen while sharing soups, dishes with rice and meat or chicken and fruit juices or soda. That relations must be harmonious is not a presupposition. The local popular wisdom says: 'It does not matter if we quarrel and quarrel. The thing is to stay together'. Togetherness is, however, complicated by transnational life.

Mayra's struggles to combine work, home and social networking in Barcelona reveal the lack of social support in Spain, and the elevated prices she had to pay for care. Care for her child, for instance, was something she imagined she could easily get if she lived in Ecuador close to her parents and many sisters. Not only childcare but cooking was another practical task that was expected to be solved within the family and without planning. As Aracely's friend stated in the introduction, in Ecuador 'there is always someone who helps in the kitchen'. The constant availability of improvised help wielded by one's family is largely expected, one of the main things Ecuadorians miss in Spain, and an important reason to help friends (*amigas*) to migrate, as well as to strive for reunification (and visits) with grandmothers and sisters, the most important supporters of working women. This expectation of support also explains why and how women left their children and elderly parents behind or made decisions to send children back to Ecuador. For instance, women in my study did not have much to say about the details of how they arranged their departures. Apart from depicting the act of leaving as an 'adventure' or 'escape', migrants often said, 'they [their relatives] are there', pointing to the taken-for-granted family support. I see these arrangements in terms of what Graeber calls 'everyday communism', not as propriety relations but as 'a principle immanent in everyday life' (2014:68), 'a permanent sense of being mutually indebted' (2014:65). This is, after all, the way in which the family operates in daily life.

As such, improvisation and spontaneity are expected in family life. In daily practices of care, family members are clearly perceived as the most flexible and inexpensive form of labour, and usually readily accessible. As Wolf states, the 'family remains the multipurpose organization par excellence' (2001 [1966]:170), as 'maximally efficient for the least cost', while being observant that this involves self-exploitation (2001 [1966]:172). When there are no 'available hands' in close proximity, family members have the option of purchasing labour, 'a girl who helps' (*una chica que ayuda*) at home. Women struggle to recruit the most adequate inexpensive domestic

helper in an environment in which everybody seems to have access to such assistance. As a society with a wide socio-economic gap, Ecuador appears divided between people who have domestic service and those who provide it, or between ‘servant-supplying and servant-employing households’, as has been previously stated regarding Colombian society (Rubbo and Taussig quoted in Qayum and Raka Ray 2010:115).

The present study, however, moves beyond this strict dichotomy to show how flexible family constellations and improvised unstable forms of collaboration within and beyond extended families form a basis for social support that transcends strict gender and class inequalities. With the rise of female migration, this has become increasingly evident. Through their commitments and attentiveness, women weave social connections upwards with their employers in Barcelona (Chapter 2), and with other migrants in relatively similar social conditions, creating new resources and caring networks for themselves and their families in both countries. In this dynamic, caring relations and strong commitments of support coexist with social and gender inequality.

In the following section I will describe how deep family commitments, called *compromisos* in the Ecuadorian lowlands, constitute the primary sources for the creation of intimacy, families and social relations. *Compromisos* can be described initially as the sense of being in debt that connects one individual to another, thus facilitating the mobilisation of care, as well as the emergence of new conflicts and demands.

Ecuadorians and their *compromisos*

In his study of the moral economy of remittances among Peruvian migrants Paerregaard states: ‘Essentially *compromiso* means the personal commitment that Peruvians make to support families or friends at specific moments in their lives’ (2014:66). While Paerregaard focuses his analysis on how people talk about remittances in terms of *compromisos* (2014:65), I emphasise more broadly how people understand *compromiso* as a means of constructing themselves as social beings in interdependence with others, and how this shapes

the basis for care in the context of migration. On the one hand, *compromiso* involves an active connection to another, the absolute first instance being a child or a partner, as new components of one's social life. On the other hand, *compromiso* should be understood in relation to broader feelings of obligation in regard to parents, and also to family constellations that include friends, neighbours and co-parents, thus shaping the foundation for relations of care. When Ecuadorians in this study speak of *compromisos* they basically refer to obligations, the deep feelings of debt, and it is through acts (as well as hopes and promises) of paying and repaying these debts that they reproduce social and intimate bonds.

When talking with other Ecuadorians in Barcelona, the importance of togetherness and company and the absurdity of being alone, were often topics we discussed in our shared destinies as migrants. They worried about seeing me alone in the city and tried to provide some assistance. They felt it was their task to help me in whatever way they could since they knew this city, they lived there, and I was 'just a visitor'. For instance, Celia's response when I informally invited her to a meeting in Barcelona where I would speak was: 'Of course I will be there, how I could leave you alone?' (*Cómo te voy a dejar sola?*) It was not lip service but important to show her strong feeling of solidarity at that moment, a desire to be at my side—though we had met only two times earlier when I had invited her for a coffee and chat in my role of researcher. Other women, friends and informants for this study offered me a bed and insisted on picking me up at the airport even though they had—as I knew with great certainty—neither free time nor economic resources. I also remember one afternoon in Paraíso (Ecuador) when I met 25-year-old Jimmy for the first time. We sat on two plastic chairs in an empty living room in an apartment he had just moved into. I silently examined a newly-arrived stove still packaged and commented. 'Oh, you are planning to cook? Can you cook?' He said, 'No, not me, but she can'' 'She?' 'Yeah, I was getting into a "commitment" (*me estaba haciendo de compromiso*), but that is over now (*se terminó*)'. This expression has multiple connotations when people speak, from close links to broad social networks, but each case denotes their duty to others they love or who are critical to their lives, such as people in higher social positions who can provide access to other resources as seen in the last chapter.

'*Hacerse de compromiso*', meaning 'acquiring a commitment' or 'getting into a commitment' is a widely used expression in the Ecuadorian lowlands along the Pacific Ocean, referring to the fluid

process whereby individuals start a family on their own, considered the biggest transformation of oneself in terms of assuming life's responsibility. This is not initiated with a nuptial wedding, but rather by cohabitation, a so-called 'free union' (*unión libre*) often expressed in terms of a *compromiso*.⁵² 'Getting into a commitment' describes the way a man and a woman start a relationship with serious expectations but with a subtle understanding that individuals can change their mind.

On the other hand, *compromiso* points to the obligation to care for one's own child, or even a child acquired through what scholars have called 'fictive' or 'ritual' kinship, bonds of *comadrazgo* and *compadrazgo* (godparenting, co-parenting, see Chapter 4). Young adults with their new *compromiso*, their baby, would come to experience the support of their families and friends, their dependence on this support, and their offerings in exchange for this assistance. Furthermore, the imperative feeling of obligation that *compromiso* involves also includes elderly parents; however, this intergenerational bond to the elderly is not called *compromiso*. In my dialogues with informants this relationship and the obligation involved was experienced as self-evident, and I was often confronted with the question: 'Who otherwise could support an elderly parent if not his/her own children? Elderly parents remain also the main worry of women in migration, because they are old, sick or they have much responsibility with small or grown rebellious grandchildren. *Compromiso* represents the basic experience of individuals constructing social belonging through their moral debts, and this inevitably comes with duties and hopes to be reciprocated—or at least, of not being forgotten or betrayed.

Compromisos accompany migrants on their transnational journeys, as the example of Marta presented below. Her story provides an entry point for describing issues of attentiveness in a transnational perspective, not in stable, stationary terms but in a permanent

⁵² Although the Ecuadorian government, and Catholic and Evangelical churches incentivise marriage, free unions are increasing in the whole country. According to Encuesta Endemain (CEPAR), in Guayas Province alone, where the interviewed families in this study come from, 62 percent of women aged 15 to 49 years old live in free unions (ENDEMAIN CEPAR). According to INEC Ecuador, in 2001 17.72 per cent of the population were living in free unions. By 2011 this had increased to 20.43 per cent in the whole country. According to an article published in *Diario El Telégrafo* (Octubre 2013) in Guayaquil, 42 per cent of the young people aged 20-29 year old lived in free unions, while in Quito the corresponding percentage was 20 per cent <http://www.telegrafo.com.ec/sociedad/item/la-union-libre-cuestion-cultural-o-de-prioridades.html>

movement back and forth, through the mobility of care. She lives in Barcelona but must attend to many *compromisos* in Ecuador in order to sustain a social dynamic in which her children grow up being protected despite their parents' absence. Marta struggles economically and emotionally with her intensive transnational life, which she often calls her 'double life' (*la doble vida*), signalling double costs, double worries. She and her husband shared an apartment first with other friends and relatives from her town, and later with their adult son and his family. 'This is to help him to pay the apartment mortgage', she explained.

In sum, *compromiso* embraces feelings of being in debt, responsibility and obligation, first with children and partners and, second, with broader social connections. Also, *compromisos* are acquired debts, key issues of one's social life. These acquired debts, however, do not necessarily have to be paid 'tit-for-tat' as in reciprocal balanced exchanges (Sahlins 1972). The importance of *compromiso* rests in the very idea of becoming socially bonded. One *compromiso* leads to another, forming a chain of people linked by their particular obligations. It is, as Graeber puts it, 'the foundation of all human sociability' (2014). Social life is full of *compromisos*, and the whole dynamic of mobilising care depends on how individuals expand their social connections via the daily management of networking.

Creating connections in Ecuador

Marta, in her middle forties when I first met her, had migrated to Spain in the late 1990s but her six children aged 3 to 15 years old remained in Ecuador. She was a schoolteacher in her hometown of Las Palmas before reuniting with her husband in Barcelona, a decision she had taken at a moment when he was ill and unemployed. Her husband had left due to economic pressures when his own business went bankrupt. Like other men and women in the town, he had left with friends and relatives. Marta felt pressured in Ecuador by the description from a *comadre* (co-mother) who had met her husband in Barcelona. She had told Marta: 'Look *comadre*, if you don't go there [Barcelona], he'll die, he is very ill, very skinny!'

In Barcelona, Marta was a domestic worker (*empleada*) for different upper-middle-class families, which she said she was lucky to have due to her contacts, and because she knew ‘how to talk with people in good social positions’. At work, she had to vacuum the floors, clean toilets and the kitchen, and sometimes help in cooking, though often there were other who prepared the meals. Marta said also that the same families where she worked wanted to have her again and again and they kept in good contact. She felt fortunate to have this solid reputation, which allowed her to avoid unemployment for longer periods. When she could not find jobs as a domestic worker, she did cleaning if necessary. Antonio, her husband, was not so fortunate. He worked in the construction industry and was unexpectedly fired.

I met Marta on one of her visits to her children in Ecuador. We happened to meet at the office of an Ecuadorian-Spanish housing project in her town Las Palmas because I was trying to contact one of the staff I had previously interviewed in Barcelona. She was waiting for her *compadre* (an engineer working in the project), who is the godparent (*el padrino*) of one of her children. She wanted him to repay a debt. She and her husband had made a significant loan to this man for his business, instead of investing it in their own house or reuniting with children or returning earlier to Ecuador. She was upset when she explained her unavoidable obligation: ‘You cannot deny a loan to your *compadre*, especially when the promise is to make good business together later and repay it’. Her *compadre* had also been living in Barcelona. In the face of a lack of job opportunities in the construction industry where he worked, he had joined some Spanish entrepreneurs in the building project, an issue I return to later in this chapter.

Las Palmas, located in Guayas Province, 105 km north of Guayaquil, is notorious in the region by its high rate of out-migration. In fact, people from Las Palmas had created their own association in Barcelona. Each August they celebrated the founding of their town, like their families did simultaneously in Ecuador. People said that in Las Palmas every family has a female relative in Italy or Spain. As I realised during fieldwork, it was common for people to have a generally negative opinion about absent women and separated families. Everybody recognised migration as a sacrifice when mothers and children could not meet for many years. ‘What will happen to all these children growing alone in this town?’ lamented a medical doctor of Las Palmas in an interview. However, when talking about particular cases of women they knew more closely in the town, the sentiment

was different, in that they were viewed as adventurous, risky and doing something positive for the family economy.

In one of the shops in downtown Las Palmas, I met Marta for our first interview, as we had agreed in a phone conversation. The shop belonged to her family and was run by her oldest daughter, Alexandra, 23 years old at the time. Clothes, make-up, rubber boots, flip flop sandals, and plastic flowers for home decoration were among the many items sold there. Marta explained that the shop was going to be moved to a cheaper part of the downtown area. Before, she had hoped that they would earn something more with this investment and be able to help finance the lives of their children in Ecuador. Remittances were not enough. Job availability was uncertain in Barcelona. They had perhaps made some mistakes, Marta said: 'We have lent so much money here in Ecuador to the family, acquaintances, and friends, but nobody repays!' The business they had started was losing money, Marta said, but at least it kept their daughter busy. It helped her to get out of the domestic routines and provided some space of freedom from a jealous boyfriend. An important aspect was that the business visibly represented Antonio's and Marta's support of and engagement with their children, which was significant because they could not afford to renovate the house at the time, as was expected from the people in their social environment, and as they had planned in the beginning of their migration. Family enterprises that were started with money from migration were important in showing commitment to those left behind.

Frequently, Marta's life looked like an intensive process of indecision about whether to return to Ecuador to the children, who were becoming adults in her absence, or to stay longer in Barcelona with her husband who later found stable employment in a city museum. As she described her trips between Ecuador and Barcelona, I often imagined her oscillating between two points, constantly accompanied by her worries of constructing the necessary relations to secure the well-being of the children and sharing time with her husband. In the past years, she felt obliged to stay even longer in Ecuador because her elderly father, who lived with her children, had become seriously ill. When she spent time in Ecuador, she also considered returning to her job as a schoolteacher.

Marta organised her double life through phone calls and frequent expensive visits to Ecuador, arranging social connections through favours and loans, and confronting the enduring dilemma of sending or travelling. For her, the most important commitment was providing

resources for her children's education, and she mobilised all her contacts in Las Palmas to get her daughter a job at the local bank. In this way, Marta involved herself and her *comadres*, *compadres* (co-parents), friends and former colleagues in a series of debt relations, not only through money but with favours and being 'sociable and attentive'. She activated social relations in Ecuador, hoping that she could ask for contacts or jobs for the children, or simply have a functioning social network when she visited Ecuador, of great importance to her since she planned to return at some point. By visiting frequently and attending to her multiple contacts, Marta made possible the fulfilment of her obligations to her children. She was caring for her children while cultivating her social network of care and protection, in which her attentiveness was a key aspect of construction and maintenance of social relations.

While *compromiso* describes the feeling and the compulsory character of relationships, attentiveness represents its practical form. Attentiveness comprises the instrumental and concrete ways in which individuals show their commitments to others through the daily practice of care. This performance of attentiveness and how Ecuadorians talk about it reveals love, obligation and solidarity. But a focus on attentiveness also makes visible how society remains firmly based on social inequalities of class, gender and race. As previously discussed, attentiveness is often expressed through the expressions to help, to care for, and to attend to, three terms with diverse nuances that are socially circumscribed to a female realm.⁵³ By describing *atender*, to attend to, I want to highlight simultaneously, love and mutual support, as well as gender and social hierarchical orders, as important components of Ecuadorian society, and as determinant factors in how care becomes mobilised, or not so, in social processes that eventually differentiate lives with more or less access to care.

⁵³ Beyond the domestic environment and family relations, 'atender' is broadly used in business and commercial relations. To attend a shop (*atender un negocio*) for instance, or when a waitress serves the customs in a restaurant, he/she says: 'Ya le atiendo' (Wait, I come to you in a moment), or 'En qué le sirvo señorita?' (How I can help you miss). In this case, as well as when it is used about the *empleadas*, 'atender' carries the notion of servitude within the framework of a clear social hierarchy. In business, the term is somehow metaphorically used when the owner serves the client. The owner and the client must be discursively put in the same level when the given attention is good. Curiously, in 2015 the government arranged a project of training people in public offices to give good attention to the clients in order to better the culture of business in the whole country.

Attentiveness and sacrifice

The notions of *atender* and attentiveness involve the practice of care, to care for others, for their needs, making the life of others pleasant, to assist, even to serve others. To me, as an Ecuadorian, *atender* is a familiar but old-fashioned concept. Young, educated ‘modern’ women use the expressions attentiveness or *atender* in daily talk much less frequently. However, Aracely and Grace’s conversation about the sick son in Ecuador presented in the introduction, brings the term back and raises questions of feelings and emotions and about the right way to express them at a distance, even exploring the possibility of measuring it in dollars. When Aracely, in one of our conversations, asked me with curiosity: ‘Who attends to your husband when you are here in Barcelona?’ (*Y quién atiende a tu marido cuando tu estás aquí en Barcelona?*), I felt threatened. Its meaning was transformed from standing for a mother’s love and dedication to her son, to representing an old-fashioned *machista* sentiment in which a woman has an absolute obligation to serve her husband. Aracely might have noted my expression of disdain and explained: ‘Yeah, I mean, do you have a girl who attends to him (*una chica que lo atiende*), somebody who helps him, you know?’ After a moment of silence, I said, clearly disturbed: ‘He takes care of himself. He is not a child, is he?’ (*El mismo, no es un niño, no?*). Thus, *atender* with its engendered contradictory meanings of love and servitude reflects perfectly the ambiguity of care.

To attend to someone as a wife or mother is a strongly gendered expression. Both involve love for, duty to and responsibility for a man (husband or son) by a woman. The task to *atender* remains exclusively female. In contrast, men would only refer to themselves as *atendiendo* (attending) to a woman in exceptional cases. Because it is not expected for a man to ‘attend to someone’, it suggests something extraordinary, an effeminate character, or some signal of a troubled, weak, unsuccessful man. For a woman on the contrary, the word indicates her primary obligation, the way of being a wife, a mother, and even a sister or a daughter. To attend to someone is the essence of being a woman. It is an important basis for how women construct themselves in relation to the social world, which is similar to what

Camacho calls ‘being for and through others’ (2001).⁵⁴ Attentiveness and commitments are at the basis of how to understand care as the necessary resource for the construction of social relations and intimacy among individuals. Care, seen as daily attentiveness, is understood to be produced and put on the move within a feminine world. In this sense, *atender*, as a strongly gendered term, liberates men from the responsibility to directly care, and doing so, separates them from daily participation in the household and the affective world. Perhaps due to these separated gendered understandings of daily life, and with a feeling of being surpassed by their burdens, women frequently framed attentiveness in terms of sacrifice.⁵⁵ However, narratives of sacrifice are not only extreme depictions of suffering, they also allow ingress to ‘forbidden spaces’, that socially or morally had previously not admitted women. Examples include labour migration abroad—earlier regarded as a male issue (*cosa de hombres*)— and sex work (Wiling 2015 for the Ecuadorian case), two ways of generating income.

Portraits of the attentive woman often associate sacrifice with motherhood, and mothers themselves may express many of their decisions as ‘sacrifice for the sake of the family’ (*por la familia*). Earlier literature on women and gender in Latin America represented women in the region as ‘passive and subjugated, whose agency is limited to an ideal of the Virgin Mary’ (for a critique, see Behar 1993, Navarro 2002).⁵⁶ Women as well as religious symbols related to them were represented as unchanging without consideration of social class, historical or ethnical differences (Stevens 1973). This has been widely criticised in the new feminist Latin American literature (cf. Montoya et al. 2002). Homogenizing perspectives about women’s ideals of motherhood have also been questioned in reference to the Ecuadorian case by observing how women themselves appropriate religious icons and adapt them in daily life (Calderón Muñoz 2014). Since women in

⁵⁴ In explaining gender relations in Ecuador, Camacho (2001) perceives that ‘being to other, being through other’ (*ser para otros, ser a través de otros*) constitutes the ‘ground of female identity’ and as such, one explanation for the perpetuation of male domestic violence (see also Wagner 2004). My explanation differs because I considered this ‘way of being’ also as a basis for caring relations, a reason for women to leave and sustain their families, often with support of other women.

⁵⁵ In southern Ecuadorian highlands, an excessive burden of responsibility on women and unrealistic social expectation is said to be manifested in form of *nervios* (Forneman 1989).

⁵⁶ These perspectives had been strongly influenced by Stevens’ work in which the author argues that Latin American women’s identity has its basis in the dichotomy of machismo/marianismo (1973).

my study themselves talked of their sacrifices I see these as life narratives in which women perceive themselves as giving more than they receive, in which reciprocity has failed. These women who are also mothers, being a mixed group of Catholics, evangelical Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses, often describe their desires, obligations and decisions to attend to their families, the daily practice of care, as a sort of sacrifice for someone else to whom they feel obligated: 'for the children' (*lo hago todo por mis hijos*), or for their spouses, 'because he is the father of my children' (*por el padre de mis hijos*).

In the previous chapter, we saw how migration itself may be seen as a sacrifice in which women offer themselves to an unknown destiny that brings drastic transformation in individuals' lives, which sometimes does not conform to initial expectations, and obliges women to take low-status jobs and live far away from their family. As Emperatriz, in her middle-sixties, said about moving from her well-off family in Las Palmas to a shared small apartment in Barcelona and taking a job as caregiver and cleaner: 'Nobody can say that they experience glory by coming here, but rather sacrifice, doing jobs that we never could think to do in our country'. She expresses sacrifice in direct connection to the downgrading of her social status in Spain, a life with a heavy burden of work, that is not only physical, but also lacks recognition. Apparently, it is a job that does not provide a source of dignity, but rather 'just an income'. To transform low-status jobs into a positive experience, as we saw in the last chapter, requires luck in finding kind-hearted employers, and involves an enormous burden of working with one's own feelings, being conscious of the other's expectations. Sacrifice is women's philosophical reading of their daily burdens and the consequences of their migration. Their intensive lives of attentiveness oblige them to sacrifice themselves in order to reach a 'better life'.

In sum, though portraits of sacrifice are close to the ideal 'attentive woman', images of 'sacrificing women' cannot be seen strictly from the perspective of pain, suffering, or patriarchal structures. Forms of representation and rhetoric concerning suffering and passivity alone do not provide a complete account for the complexity of women's lives. Women in my study see themselves as profoundly sacrificing but simultaneously as active workers and family members, and tireless builders of social relations, who are strong enough to search for alternatives at home and abroad in circumstances that often do not offer advancement from their original social status. By relying on portraits of sacrifice, women also claim attention for their

unrecognised efforts in changing unequal life conditions. Social recognition is moreover a source of meaning for women's lives of sacrifice. That is, care as attentiveness and sacrifice cannot be seen in terms of isolated persons, but is produced in the process of social connection and acknowledgement, as in the relations constructed with Spanish employers described in the previous chapter. While these sacrifices to provide care for others reveal social hierarchy and gender inequality, at the same time attentiveness is the resource and the medium in which women expand their possibilities for accessing and providing support.

Care, attentiveness and inequality

When my female research informants talked about their higher social status in Ecuador prior to migration, they gladly and nostalgically reminded me of how social class is organised in Ecuador: 'Gladis, you know, when one is relatively well-off in Ecuador, you have a girl who helps (*ayuda*) at home'. 'A girl who helps' (*una chica que ayuda*), an *empleada*, provided practical assistance and status. The family's domestic service in Ecuador was presented as *ayuda* (help), another category of care that is comparable to attending, showing an effort to lessen the social differences that the relation implies. The softer tone of *ayudar* suggests that the people who give care and those who receive it might meet somewhere under equal conditions. When used in reference to an *empleada*, *ayudar* is not as strong as *atender*, but the use of the term *empleada* itself illustrates hierarchical relations between employer and employee. Moreover, the smooth way in which the expression 'our employee' (*nuestra empleada*) flows in daily conversation, reveals a social and racial hierarchy assumed as 'natural' in the Ecuadorian context. In Ecuador, a great majority of domestic workers are indigenous or Afro-Ecuadorian women with low levels of education and/or a lack of social contacts needed to enable them to move upward. Using the term *ayuda* for domestic assistance, employers also give the activity a familial character. The expression may also involve the assumed idea that since it is 'only help' and not an actual job, it should be cheap. As such, *ayudar* provides a double meaning for the valuation of domestic care jobs. Furthermore, the

term also reveals a world of gendered differences when used in relation to a couple, as we will see in Chapter 5 which discusses men in the domestic environment.

Another term related to attend and help is *cuidar*, to care for. Aracely, Lupe and other women also described their jobs as care: ‘I care for an elderly man’ (*Le cuido a un señor mayor*), said Aracely. They also use *cuidar* in reference to their children, involving in this sense—in Spanish—multiple loving attitudes and material provision, as well as routine tasks and discipline. In the context of care work, *cuidar* is the most similar to ‘care for’, as used in English. It is a discrete way to talk about ‘cleaning the other’s dirt’. *Cuidar* at the same time represents the light side of the work of caring. The discrete feeling of the term is given relevance, giving a sense of ‘just accompanying’. *Cuidar* is a very ambiguous term with multiple shifting meanings. *Cuidar*, *ayudar*, *atender* are the three most significant terms that follow women in their double lives of care, and they represent their ways of living and mobilising care at work, within families and in larger social constellations. *Atender*, as an expanded idea of care, cannot be reduced to compliance and passivity, but should embrace meanings of solidarity and kindness that coexist within social and family hierarchies as well.

In the case of a domestic servant, an *empleada doméstica* or ‘a girl who helps’, the social hierarchy is most evident as the *empleada* attends to the boss. In Guayaquil, domestic workers are mostly women from the poor barrios, or from the countryside, but surely *familias guayaquileñas* would not gladly employ an indigenous woman from the highlands, a particular decision based on preferences for shared culinary traditions, as well as due to still persistent racist ideas of ‘Indians as dirty’ (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1998) and ‘ignorant’ (Clark 1998:203). Casanova claims that there are still a majority of mestizos doing this job in Guayaquil, and according to her, workers and employers may have similar ‘racial backgrounds’ (2013). Due to colonial history whiteness means superiority in the Ecuadorian imaginary, but, as Roberts has pointed out, ‘race is experienced as alterable’ (2012); for instance, through behaviour and education (Roberts 2012, Colloredo-Mansfeld 1998, Weismantel 1988). Regardless of skin colour, ‘mestizos in higher socio-economic positions are seen as whiter than poorer mestizos’ (Casanova 2013).

In such a highly hierarchical asymmetrical context, relations of attentiveness reflect not only love and caring feelings, and obligations to exchange favours, but also gender, class, and racial hierarchies.

How these social hierarchies become mixed with friendly compassionate relations varies according to class, restrictive laws or urgent mutual needs, as in the model of patron-client ties (see Chapter 2). In rich neighbourhoods in larger cities of Ecuador like Quito or Guayaquil, one may sometimes still see rich women with their uniform-clad *empleadas* walking behind them, carrying bags or babies. However, families in small towns and lower-middle-class families in Ecuador who can afford domestic service are more likely to recreate family relations with their *empleadas*, as in the case of families in this study (see Abbots 2012 for southern Ecuador). This does not mean that domestic workers get more benefits as a family member, but it does mean that they have to work the whole day if required, 'as families do'. Inequalities based on race and class mark social relations in Ecuador and especially so in the domestic care labour market. Yet, this same inequality experienced 'at home' forces people to engage in exchanges with each other, the asymmetrical exchanges that may reproduce care. The next section is about how this intersection of care and inequality takes new shape through migration.

Attending during absence

When women are absent from their families due to labour migration or for other reasons, the question becomes how to manage this world of attentiveness, full of activities and duties, with all the daily management it requires including domestic help and the commitment of others. How do migrant mothers or daughters fulfil their own commitments while being far away? If women become providers for their families, what happens to this socially prescribed female devotion and attention? The ideals of *atender* go through a series of practical adjustments. The typical response is to delegate the tasks of attentiveness and care to others in the home country or compensate with remittances and gifts. But what does this mean? How does a greater access to money and the physical absence of the mother/wife/daughter redefine care with relation to spouses, parents, children and siblings? The moral and practical engagement represented by commitments, attentiveness and sacrifices opens a

space for the analysis of changing gender and intergenerational relationships in family life and broader social networks.

To *atender* requires physical presence. Worrying about how to attend to her son, Aracely, for instance, arranged to have her mother in Ecuador care for him, while she sent money, visited sporadically and consistently called on the phone. Aracely is a widow and lives in Barcelona with her daughter and oldest son, as well as her son's wife and two small grandchildren. They live in the same building where she works, 'helping and caring for an elderly man'. When she left Ecuador, her second eldest son was eight years old. He had lived most of his life with his grandparents in Las Palmas. His illness, however, described in the introduction, disturbed the relatively quiet long-distance relation and called for a mother's visit. Aracely wanted to be in Ecuador beside him and bring as much money as possible, fulfilling her role as a mother in the most appropriate way. As a mother at a distance Aracely tried to balance her life between Ecuador and Spain, between home and work, between children and relatives here and there. Visits and phone calls accompanied remittances. Verbal and corporeal expressions had to be supplemented with cash and gifts. Millions of mothers like Aracely around the world at this moment have to adjust their expressions of love to the basic condition of migration, that of geographical distance.

It is with all these convictions of commitments, attentiveness and sacrifices that women experience social life in Barcelona. Constructing and cultivating connections is a pleasure and brings satisfaction, vital information and life opportunities, but it also requires enormous daily effort, time and energy and hopes that it all will work well for the family's sake and for the continuation of the social life. Women define themselves as builders of social relations; they say simply they are *amigueras* (extremely sociable). Being *amigueras* is the way in which women solve a great part of their problems related to care.

Mayra, whom I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, worked hard engaging others in her networks. Favours and debts were 'big', like the migration journey itself, but they could also be 'small' favours with acquaintances and clients, like a couple of hours of childcare, which might be paid through a combination of cash and food. Mayra was not the best example of attentiveness and sacrifice, but she showed how the creation and maintenance of a social network create potentialities of support, in case the need emerges. Mayra told me, as did other younger women, that attentiveness was old-fashioned, not

what was expected from a ‘modern’ woman, who is independent, works, and has her own money, though her definition did not exclude the expectation of a home with a good husband and father providing for the family.

Sisters, friends and clients

Mayra shared a three-bedroom apartment with her sisters, her husband and her two-year-old son in Via Bella in Barcelona. ‘*Yo soy amiguera*’ (I’m very sociable), Mayra said, trying to describe her own personality and strong aspirations to continually broaden her social connections. Through this easy-going character she made friends quickly, which in turn provided information about jobs, housing, good prices of mobile phones, clothes and shoes, opportunities to send gifts to Ecuador and to observe other peoples’ lifestyles. In her network she had found, for instance, the teenage daughter of a neighbour who helped watch her child when necessary. When she was on good terms with her two sisters and they had time, they also assisted her. When her husband came home in the evening she was back from her second job cleaning a *locutorio* or being a cashier at a Latin American grocery store in the neighbourhood. If her Yanbal direct sales left some ‘free time’, she took English classes at the public school of *el Ayuntamiento* (City Hall), ‘because it was free’. This was also convenient for her desire to become a tourist guide in Barcelona and a professional photographer in the future.

Mayra was often very busy and seemed to arrange everything on her own. She was curious and had all kind of questions. She spoke loudly and obliged others to listen. In comparison, her sisters could easily be perceived as shy. Whenever she had time on the weekends, she invited her many friends to her home where she offered delicious Ecuadorian food in a festive atmosphere. She was an attentive hostess and could jokingly tell her guests ‘to not eat too much but think of the others who also are hungry’. Being *amiguera* she felt free to request others’ help. She had certainly defined her main commitments: her child and husband. For them, everything was ready and organised at home. But she constantly quarrelled with her sisters, as she demanded their ‘betterment’, that they should not being lazy (*vagas*) but hard-working, even though they worked full-time themselves. Perhaps she

believed that as the eldest sister she had authority over and responsibility for them, but it was also based on relations of moral debts and credits, as she understood that.

Mayra had supported her two sisters' move from Ecuador to Barcelona, and expected their unconditional help, even when she did not directly ask for it. She felt frustrated when they did not reciprocate. How could they sleep late instead of taking her son to kindergarten? She asked me this once when her sister slept in one morning to compensate for her arduous long hours working late nights in a restaurant. Rethinking the situation of sharing the apartment with her sisters, she said that it was definitely not her idea to have them live with her in Spain when she invited them. She wanted the sisters to come to Spain to work and immediately become independent and live elsewhere. (Mayra did not mention that the high costs of an apartment obliged her to live with others). She wished her sisters could be 'extroverted' and not shy (*espabiladas y no caídas*, she said). Mayra herself felt deeply in debt to her friend Jessica, a classmate at the University of Guayaquil, who had helped her move to Spain. Jessica had not only sent Mayra an invitation, but also pushed her from her very first day in Spain to go out and search for jobs. 'It was cold that morning, but it was good Jessica did it', Mayra said, remembering proudly that she had felt nervous but strong enough to confront this new situation in another country.

Mayra said that her sisters' well-being and getting ahead was a priority because they had to support their many siblings and elderly parents in Ecuador. It was tacitly understood among them that since the sisters were single, they had to support the left-behind family. This was not Mayra's direct obligation. Mayra's role was to push her sisters to assume their transnational responsibility in the best terms. She felt disappointed when one sister decided to return to Ecuador, while the other migrated to the United States where she found the 'love of her life', which Mayra assumed was a 'bad decision'. She felt slightly betrayed. Others owed Mayra money, catalogues and favours, but she also felt in debt. For instance, she could not deny a favour to Jessica. She expected Jessica to ask for favours so she could have the opportunity to provide some support in return. In the same sense, she expected the sisters to feel indebted to her. Mayra dedicated her time to creating forms of care through social networking. She had the skills to transform friends and acquaintances to potential collaborators. Her aspiration was for her sisters to care well for the family who remained behind, and frequently she adopted a role of

surveillance, keeping an eye on and even disciplining—or trying to—her sisters’ lives. Her example reminds us of the ambivalent, contradictory aspects of care, as it involves love and control (Johnson and Lindquist 2019), and power relations (Fisher and Tronto 1990).

Mayra was also involved in socio-economic networks, whether in her Yanbal business or through endless searches for job opportunities. Actually, judging from the comments and laughs at the Yanbal meetings at Mayra’s home, this ‘economic network’ resembled a group of friends who had once worked at the same employer’s house. One time when Mayra’s neighbour and Yanbal client, Lupe, the nurse-caregiver we met in Chapter 2, needed to find some sub-tenants to a new apartment where she was going to move, Mayra actively shared this news among acquaintances. Yanbal did not provide much cash, said Mayra, but it broadened her social networks. Shopping Mayra’s products provided a moment to chat and a chance to renew their friendship, as well as to get some advice about gifts for husbands. They also involved quarrels when someone did not pay in time, which was very common, or borrowed the Yanbal catalogues for longer than Mayra allowed. For example, because of a disagreement Mayra broke off her friendship with Celia another client and acquaintance we will also meet in this study (see a short portrait of Celia in the Appendix). These networks were a source of headaches and minimal cash, with ups and downs, but Mayra enjoyed widening her social life.

Gloria, whom I will introduce in the next section, had an active social life around the local evangelical church in Barcelona, and felt strongly in debt to her children in Ecuador. She was desperate to attend to them and when she could, she sent them cash and the best clothing and shoe deals (*las rebajas*) in the Barcelona markets. In this way, she felt that she was compensating her children, caring for them, but still felt that quite a lot had to be done. A half-built house and a potential family reunion were part of her frustration. Gloria’s story introduces the idea of care not only as provision at a present time, but also as something to be realised in the future. She lived with the constant feeling of needing to do something more and with frustration about the unfulfilled promises. ‘It is not possible now but surely will be soon’, was her belief. More than cash and material things themselves, we will see from Gloria’s story that in separated families, the promises sustain and nurture family intimacy, representing hope for the continuation of family cohesion. Her story shows that aspiration, imagination and shared narratives are also forms of care and fundamental issues in sustaining transnational life.

Caring through promises

Gloria was in her middle fifties when I met her for the first time in Barcelona. She came from Paraíso, a town outside Guayaquil. Before migrating to Spain, she worked as a high school social studies teacher, though she had never completed her university studies. It had become impossible to finish her studies because of her small children. With a meagre income from her job as teacher, and a small shop at home to attend to when she could, her life had become more complicated when her husband Pepe had migrated to Spain. They had three children together: Lucy, Jimmy and Ruth, while another son had died. Pepe had other adult children from an earlier relationship, and two of those daughters also lived in Barcelona; one of them had helped him to migrate. Gloria had her elderly mother Anita, and another daughter, Karen, from an earlier partner. Karen shared another little house with grandmother Anita, her husband and their two children in another corner of Paraíso.

Gloria had joined her husband Pepe in Barcelona, after he had spent eight months without sending money to Ecuador. She made the decision facing pressure over the unclear, unstable character that their relation had acquired during his absence. She strongly believed in the obligation of a husband living abroad to send remittances for the family behind. She said Pepe had gone to Spain to work and send money. ‘Nooo, I went just to see if there was something I could do’, Pepe defended himself. Actually, she felt worried about what had happened to her husband, and that perhaps he had found another woman. ‘One day I woke up and talked with my brother who also lives in Barcelona. I told him to send an ultimatum to Pepe: “Come home or I’ll sell everything and join you there!” Why must he be there without sending anything?’ It was difficult to stay at home alone with the children. After the ultimatum Pepe had hurried to send money to buy a ticket for her. Gloria left her job and sold her little shop and all the other machines they owned from an earlier bankrupt business, a factory of aluminium showcases.

Gloria was enthusiastic, friendly and talkative. We met for the first time in Sant Antoni, one of the metro stations in downtown Barcelona. She worked there as a guide providing information to passengers in the metropolitan transportation system. Since she noted that I was new in Barcelona, she took time to explain the most economical way to

travel in the city. When we identified each other as Ecuadorians she told me about her family situation. ‘I won’t rest until my children come here’, Gloria said. When we became friends, she described her lack of desire to visit or return to Ecuador since her son had died tragically in her absence. With the fear of not getting into Spain again if she left, she had not taken part in his funeral. Instead, together with Pepe, they had collected money in the church to contribute to the costs of the funeral. Moreover, Gloria was afraid that the neighbours and friends in Paraíso would blame her for having left and for her son’s tragedy. In contrast, she saw their church in Barcelona as her family, which had become most clear during her son’s death. The church with ‘sisters and brothers’, as they called themselves, gave economic and emotional support. She and Pepe reciprocated this support with loyalty, attending service every Sunday, and hosting weekly bible study meetings at their home.

Paraíso, where Gloria and Pepe’s children lived in Ecuador, was an active commercial town. Many of the inhabitants worked in Guayaquil, travelling 20 minutes by bus each day. I first travelled there to meet Pepe’s and Gloria’s family in 2008. Their children had recently rented a modest three-room apartment in a noisy corner of the barrio. Their only furniture was a mattress in each room, an old TV, a CD player, perhaps 100 CD films, and a new stove still in its original package. Near the apartment there was a small, half-built decrepit house, which belonged to Gloria and Pepe. What they called ‘our house’ was only one floor and some columns that would hypothetically support the construction of a second one. One space beside the street was intended as a shop, ‘*para alquilar o poner un negocio*’ (to rent or to start a business), the children said. However, the few walls we could see were covered with a green layer of moss. It was impossible to live there. That was why the children paid 100 dollars per month for an apartment—too much, they said. At best, they had around 300 dollars per month to support themselves: Lucy with her two children, Jimmy and Ruth. Lucy’s husband was unemployed and supported the family with fruits and vegetables he grew at his parents’ farm in the province of Manabí. Jimmy worked as seller at a shoe boutique in La Bahía, a big market in downtown Guayaquil. He earned around 250 dollars per month. Remittances from Barcelona were 150 dollars in the best of months, ‘sometimes, just clothes, too big for us!’ Lucy explained with a laugh, understanding that parents could not always know their real needs. These siblings often lamented that the house could not be used, which made them appear to be

among the poorest and most unfortunate migrant families of the barrio, and they were a bit ashamed about that. Since Pepe and Gloria had plans to reunite the whole family in Barcelona, they had not seen the house in Paraíso as a priority, but they worried about it all the time. Their hopes for reunification and the stress of saving enough money to start the house renovation were a constant concern. At the same time, these still unfulfilled fragile promises nurtured the family life, being the central point of daily conversation and a source of both optimism and uncertainty in Barcelona and in Paraíso.

Bélgica, a neighbour and friend of the family, commented: 'Everybody had been successful in Spain, except Gloria and Pepe.' Why, after 10 years in Barcelona, had they still not managed to build the house for their children? This was in contrast to, for example, Comadre Rosa (another neighbour and migrant she knew), who had already finished her house. Moreover, Bélgica continued, Rosa had bought all the necessary appliances: a washing machine, a stove, a refrigerator, a TV and furniture for a house that she rarely visited, but which was occupied by her son. Rosa was a good mother, Bélgica explained: 'She is responsible! And look how elegant she is, blonde, lipstick, sunglasses, nice clothes, leggings, ooh my God, she is lucky!' Bélgica emphatically stated that the unfinished house showed the parents' lack of engagement, and claimed that she was more concerned than 'actual' parents about the children's needs, because 'she was there'. 'I'm like a mother to these guys' (*Soy como una madre para estos muchachos!*). 'When the mother is absent somebody must do it [the mother role]', she continued. Bélgica's gossip reveals a lot, but a relevant issue is that though parents tried to alleviate their absence with gifts, money, worries, and phone calls, neighbours still thought it was insufficient. It was the face-to-face care which was more highly valued. There is a hierarchy in caring forms, especially when individuals do not see the basic promises fulfilled, such as the house with its furniture.

So far, I have followed a social dynamic that puts the gift of care on the move among feelings of obligation and mutual debt. It has been shown how care is produced and reproduced, locally and transnationally, through expanding webs of kinship and friendship. We have also met three women, Marta, Mayra and Gloria, with their intensive social lives and their debts. We will meet these women again in the coming chapters.

Gloria's case in particular shows that care, love and the reproduction of family intimacy are grounded on future promises, not

least the family house (*la casa*). Gloria's family house was typical of the unfulfilled promise that migrant parents had for their left-behind children and could be read either as abandonment or as a promise of unity. As we will see, a shared narrative of the house is necessary for imaging the future of the family. When describing intimacy, Berlant (as quoted by McKay 2007:179) notes that 'at its root', there is 'an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way'. As I will elaborate on in the next section, the house is a central issue of family cohesion, and it concentrates all commitments and sacrifices that individuals in migration can offer to their families. As such, the material house with its process of imagining and constructing has much to reveal about transnational caring relations.

Caring through the material house

La casa as the term is used in Spanish, refers both to the material house and a home with its social relations and cultural meanings. For Ecuadorians, as well as for many other migrants, the house is central in the construction of transnational family relations and involves meanings of belonging and status beyond economic investment (Norman 2007:74,96, Boccagni 2014). If one considers the house as a process, like care itself, it can be promising terrain to think 'the migrant house' (Dalakoglou 2010). This becomes particularly significant in the example of Gloria, in which the house goes back and forth from idea to material form, in a process of imagining, rebuilding and eventually moving in. The house as a goal to be achieved represents a great deal of concrete discussions about material issues, but also concerns the terrain of imagination, aspirations for the future, and promises to fulfil. The process of the housebuilding provides Gloria's family with a particular space to think about themselves as working together toward a shared goal for their common well-being. The 'project' of the house provides a 'sense of continuity' (Horst 2011:29). How was this possible when the walls were falling down, the building was only an idea, and when even neighbours perceived it as a symbol of the abandonment of their children? The capacity of Gloria's house as an inspiring idea for togetherness and care reveals that the 'migrant house' must be considered not only as a concrete

infrastructure, but as what Dalakouglou calls ‘house-making’, that is, ‘as a dynamic process’ that includes webs of social relations around it; the ‘symbolic presence and dwelling’ of migrants at home, as well as something that is not always evident in the whole long-term process of construction while sending materials and remittances: the caring for relatives (2010:761).

For Ecuadorians, to have their own house has been and still is a very difficult endeavour. During the intensive emigration of the late 1990s, and even long before that, credit institutions were more open to issuing loans for migration and travelling than for purchasing a home, something that changed—for some more advantaged sectors—after the dollarisation of the economy, since dollars provided some kind of stability (Ospina Lozano 2010). Due to these great difficulties, when Ecuadorians arrived in Spain, they were affected (and tempted) by the housing boom and the relative ease of obtaining bank loans there. They perceived this as a good opportunity to finally have their own place and to give it to their families, thus achieving the migrant dream. This created room for imagining all kinds of possible partnerships in order to apply for bank loans. In the midst of the global economic crisis in 2008, Pepe lamented that he could not get a loan due to his age (he was close to sixty), but he looked forward to his son Jimmy’s move to Spain, when they could buy an apartment in Barcelona together. Others, like Mayra’s husband, had bought an apartment with her (Mayra’s) sister since Mayra had no formal employment and could not get a loan. Ecuadorians with a steady income bought their own apartments and this made the dreams of reuniting and staying in Spain more concrete than that of the construction of a house in Ecuador. For many families, the house in Ecuador was for a while a secondary option, but they would continue to sustain this dream in the minds of their children in the home country.⁵⁷

Housing and real estate in Spain was also a niche where Ecuadorians could get jobs as workers in the construction industry and the broader service sector related to it. Some had even started their own real estate businesses that offered services such as renting, renovating or selling apartments for other migrants in the city. At the time of my fieldwork many of these businesses with an Ecuadorian flag in the streets of Via Bella were closed, reflecting the effects of the housing crisis. As the housing boom was ending in Spain, some

⁵⁷ It has also become evident that Ecuadorians bought apartments in Spain and also constructed another in Ecuador, and that this latter was sold to pay mortgage debts in Spain later during the crisis (see Herrera 2012).

Spain-based construction investors attempted to extend their market to Ecuador. Some of their TV ads in Ecuador offered ‘European comfort and security’, playing off the stereotype of Guayaquil as dangerous and offering the possibility of getting ‘a secure place’ in a ‘gated community’ (*ciudadelas fortaleza*) that has become a symbol of status for well-off families (for a discussion of this in Guayaquil, see Andrade 2005). For instance, a Spanish company had started a housing project in Las Palmas, where Marta’s family lived and out-migration was omnipresent. At the time of fieldwork, they were constructing fifty houses mainly oriented to the migrant market. The entrepreneurs in Barcelona told me that they turned to people who wanted ‘to make a good investment’, or ‘to spend remittances with responsibility, thinking about the future’. The business, however, did not represent a promising prospect since most migrants did not have resources to buy a new house at the time. They were pressed with their payments in Spain, with sustaining their families, and were most interested in renovating or constructing a house where they already had a piece of land. Moreover, accustomed to crisis, uncertain incomes and lack of resources, Ecuadorians are often engaged in constructing their houses step-by-step and ‘with their own hands’. The process of construction often consists of adding parts, rooms, little by little, as has been observed in ‘self-construction’ or ‘self-help’ housing (e.g. Moser 2009 in Ecuador). This way of building involves family members, and when possible, friends and neighbours, as it has been largely observed in traditions of *minga*, a long-standing practice of mutual support and labour exchange in the Andes (Alberti and Mayer 1974), and one important way in which houses are still constructed in Ecuador (Klaufus 2012).

To construct, improve or renovate a house is one of the main ways to show care and engagement and this symbolism becomes even more evident in the context of migration. The process constitutes a benchmark against which people evaluate the commitment of migrants to those left behind, like Bélgica did with Gloria and Pepe. Ideas of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ parenthood merge with the migrants’ added responsibility to complete a house and to provide appliances and furniture, even if they do not visit, and regardless of who lives there. An adult son with his own family is no longer a mother’s maternal responsibility, but a ‘good migrant mother’ is someone who provides a well-equipped house no matter the age of children, as remarked above by Bélgica. Marta often reminded me, ‘children are forever’ (*los hijos son para siempre*). The expectations linked to the house

maintained by the migrant parents give place for moral judgement, but also connected them to the family members and friends in the country of origin while strengthening family bonds.

In practical terms and in a context of an unsecure future, the house fulfils multiple goals. For Gloria's family, the project of the house did not provoke conversations about what furniture they could have, but rather how they could decorate the shop that Lucy would immediately start in the street floor, *el negocio propio*. Another point of conversation was how Lucy would drop the children at school before opening the shop early in the morning. For many women in this study who had their own shops at home prior to migration, the house is more than a place; it is also the space of work and socialization, through which they are saving money by not having to rent an expensive commercial space. The house-business is also perceived as 'the best way' to earn an income while doing household and caring tasks, 'a proper female way of working and living'. The house is central to individuals' social and economic life, and for migrant families, 'house-making' reveals the existence of a 'united family with responsible parents', a family that cares, that continues. Since it is a very expensive project, the house was even described dramatically as the ultimate sacrificial act, something that requires postponing other life goals. For migrants, to construct a house also meant longer physical absence since they were obliged to stop travelling to Ecuador in order to save enough for the building. For Gloria and Pepe's children the house as promise, as a goal for the future, made sense in contrast to the 'misery' of their current life when they rented an apartment in someone else's house (*en una casa ajena*).

The 'migrant house' as a concrete infrastructure or in the process of construction, is at the heart of the migration endeavour and reveals the care relations that sustain it. The whole process of 'house-making' constitutes the 'constant dwelling and dynamic proxy presence' of the migrant at home (Dalakoglou 2010). Furthermore, as the case of Gloria's family shows, it was not only the ongoing construction or renovation of the concrete house, but the house as a project, long before the construction was initiated, which gave meaning, hopes and enthusiastic dreams for this family. By actively keeping this project ongoing, the idea of togetherness is made manifest, revealing precisely why the parents are absent, because it is worth the sacrifice, '*vale la pena el sacrificio*' on both sides, among those left behind and the absent migrants.

Moral, affective and material foundations of care

This chapter has shown the expansive character of care as observed in the dynamic social networks that weave people together through feelings of being in debt, practices of attentiveness and corresponding portraits of sacrifice. Its emphasis has been on care as a ‘moral engagement’ (Yarris 2017) deeply embedded in material and affective transactions. Debt and the spontaneous and improvised character attributed to family life are also expected in making friends (*amigas*). Individuals mainly define their feelings of being in debt in terms of *compromisos* and the practices they ‘have to’ perform as *atenciones* in expressions like: ‘I have a commitment’ or ‘I have to attend to’. Debts, feelings of being in debt and social expectations are lived and expressed as the foundations of families and social life. The meanings of commitments and attentiveness that have been highlighted in this chapter provide material to understand the mobilisation of care, which is only possible through the construction, strengthening and expanding of social relations.

An intensive life of commitments and attentiveness involve families, friends and clients in powerful social networks able to provide favours, information and returns, but this requires enormous efforts and emotional labour, which may or may not meet expectations. So strong are the burdens of women’s obligations, their lives of permanent attentiveness, that their efforts are many times described as sacrifices. While referring to suffering and unrecognised struggles, sacrifices also constitute the pleasant experience of sharing time and getting vital information, and acts of full participation in the sustenance of different generations, in person and at a distance. Women are actively immersed in ongoing processes of creating and reproducing debts, feelings of being in debt and expectations of return. Living in this way, they make sense of their own place in the group and create possibilities for increasing their sense of welfare.

Women know the importance of friends, business partners, neighbours, or a friendly social character in order to cope with their daily stress and to make a living in a new society. The importance of not being alone—not exclusively equivalent to having a partner, but being social and collective with the world around, whatever happens—is emphasised and transformed to connections that provide new opportunities in the country of arrival. Women like Marta actively construct social networks in Ecuador where her children live,

while other like Mayra struggle with sisters, friends and clients in Barcelona. Others like Gloria had found a network of protection in the local church but still felt in debt to her children, in any case strengthening their family ties through the promise of the future.

La casa, the material house, is the ‘biggest debt’, the climax of all *compromisos* and sacrifices that sustain not only the affective connection among migrants and their families behind, but it represents the very presence of migrants in their places of origin. Completing the house, however, is a long process that is not always realised, since migrant lives happen to take place between different economic crises of the countries where they are. Like the constantly expanding social and familial networks that migrants engage in, the long-term building of the house reveals migration, more broadly, as an aspirational project that is ‘under construction’. Economic ‘ups and downs’ mark family life. Nevertheless, not achieving the goal of completing a house does not seem to be the most serious obstacle for maintaining affective ties as long as the promise of the house remains alive. Perhaps as Ferraro explains regarding ‘ritual debts’ in the contexts of religious fests in the Ecuadorian Andes, ‘debts cannot and should not be paid because debts are sources of actual life and abundance, and if debts are paid, life itself may come to an end’ (2004:46).

In the following chapter I will focus on how relations of care are forged and nurtured through daily practice within the household in Ecuador, in connection to other households and in relation to the maintenance of transnational life. The experiences of ‘replacing a mother’ and the permanent exchanges of gifts of care go beyond the time of migration to Spain. The chapter will describe long-standing practices of mutual support such as co-parenthood, grandmothers’ care, and loyal daughters, as practices and ideals that shape family life and social relations, and that facilitate female migration and transnational life. This will show additionally an aspect ignored in the global care chains, that of the complexity of caring relations in the left-behind home.

CHAPTER 4 | REPLACEABLE MOTHERS

Sharing commitments of care at home and beyond

More than 30 years ago, Gloria left her daughter Karen in her mother Anita's care. Gloria was then a 17-year-old single mother. Thanks to her father's contacts, she had found a good job at the archive of the provincial planning office, the *Consejo Provincial* of Guayas in downtown Guayaquil. Although the three were living together, the girl spent the days with her grandmother. As Gloria put it,

I gave everything to support my daughter, I attended to her (*la atendía*), dressed her, brushed her hair. Later I also paid an *empleada* to watch her because my father was complaining that my mother had too much to do with my little girl . . . and Karen was growing up with my mother. When I got together with my husband, Pepe, I left my daughter with my mother when we tried to move to Venezuela because the Bolívar [Venezuelan currency] was so strong. But we got stuck in Quito. Two years later, back in Guayaquil, I wanted Karen to live with my husband and I in our new home, but my mother didn't want to let her go. She said: 'Why do you want to take her? Let her stay with me, she's fine here'. She has been there since.

In the late 1990s, when leaving for Barcelona, Gloria again needed assistance, this time not only from her mother Anita but also from her then adult daughter Karen. Gloria was in search of a home where she could leave her three younger children, Ruth and her two brothers.⁵⁸ As described in the previous chapter, she wanted to join her husband Pepe in Barcelona, and later bring her whole family. When I met Gloria, she had been living in Barcelona for seven years. During those

⁵⁸ Jimmy, one of the brothers, is much older than Ruth, and soon moved somewhere else. The other brother had died as mentioned in the last chapter.

years Ruth had been living in Karen and Anita's house. While Gloria had hoped to bring Ruth to Barcelona, Anita wanted her to remain in Ecuador: 'Why do you want to take her, she is fine here, let her stay'. Gloria, however, tried to fulfil the requirements for family reunification in order to bring the girl to Spain. The basic requisites for bringing a child to Spain were a residence permit, a job (*trabajo independiente*), and access to economic resources and 'normal housing' (*vivienda normal*) (Gil Araujo 2010:81-83).⁵⁹

In Chapter 2 we saw how women built new family ties in Barcelona by making their work meaningful through emotional labour and cultural understandings of sacrifice, made possible through Ecuadorian perceptions of elderly parents and domestic service. Chapter 3 showed how social and affective relations expanded in the intensive social networking of women through feelings of being in permanent debt. In this chapter, I explore the construction of social connection and intimacy among women of different generations, looking at the practices and ideals of sharing care for children, the elderly and the homes left behind by migrant mothers.

More specifically, this chapter focuses on the practical daily routines of attentiveness and care at home in Ecuador, in connection to other households, and in relation to the maintenance of transnational life. The chapter thus shows how the shared commitments of care among women are expressed in practice in Ecuador. However, the mobility of care seen from the experiences of sharing care or 'covering for other women' (Harris 1981) in this chapter goes beyond the instrumental needs emerging at the time of migration to Spain. This care also includes long-standing practices of mutual support such as co-parenthood and fostering, as well as ongoing family assistance provided through grandmothers' care (*el cuidado de la abuelita*)⁶⁰, and 'loyal daughters' or 'right hand' (*la mano derecha*). The chapter highlights the long-term practices available for people to create interdependence between adults and children beyond the nuclear family. These practices have facilitated female migration and sustained years of transnational life.

This chapter follows women in their daily lives of care, their experiences of attentiveness, commitment (*compromisos*) and sacrifice that reproduce female solidarity over generations. Grandmothers and the eldest daughters are regarded as key partners of

⁵⁹ What means to be *vivienda normal* is defined according to square meter per individual (Gil Araujo 2010).

⁶⁰ In Ecuador, 'grandmother' is expressed in its diminutive form *abuelita* in everyday speech.

migrant mothers, but girls of different ages also participate in the permanent circulation of the gifts of care. Even *empleadas* are expected to become ‘part of the family’ of their employer, as discussed in Chapter 2. The chapter describes intergenerational stories of mutual debts and expectations in which the mother’s migration to Spain is just one more opportunity to (re)accommodate daily care and ideals of love and family life. Care as a shared responsibility for family well-being disturbs fixed categories such as ‘caregiver’ and ‘care-receiver’, since these roles may vary along life cycles and according to individuals’ current needs and possibilities. The chapter will show the key importance of multiple female actors in responding to the growing global ‘care crisis’, as mothers become migrants caring for other families. The widespread desire for the nuclear family form, however, may come to threaten the ideal of family life and care as shared among at least three generations.

I start here with an explanation of why it is important to understand the relations of adults and children, without reducing this to a case of burdens and adult responsibilities. Instead, it is my proposition that an analysis of the dynamic relations of adults and children in the Ecuadorian context should be regarded against the backdrop of long existent ideals of family and social life in which care has never been an exclusive individual issue, but has been distributed among different families and across generations and social classes. Moreover, the shared care is not only physical and emotional work, and not just a source of duties, but also the way in which individuals find meaning and purpose for the continuation of their lives. After all, ‘sharing is not just about morality, it is also a major source of life’s pleasure’ (Graeber 2014:69). In this chapter I examine the exchanges of care among households and generations, and especially the importance of favours, material items and gifts in expressing and re-creating feelings of gratitude and indebtedness.

Mutual dependence of adults and children

As stated in the introduction, studies of transnational families have overlooked the multiplicity of local family arrangements that have long allowed women to work, to diversify their ways of earning income, and in general, to make a life in contexts of pronounced social

and economic inequality. Interestingly, this was not the case in earlier studies of women's rural-urban migration, where women's reasons to leave and the corresponding family arrangements for their children were amply debated (see Moore 1988:96-97). A discussion of long-standing practices of sharing care for/with/through children—fostering, godparenthood, grandmotherhood, the loyal daughter—will situate female migration in the broader context of mutual cooperation and solidarity as well as revealing the permanent interaction between the gift economy and women's participation in the global market of care.

There is a long history in the Andes of child circulation, fostering, and the practice of raising the children of other adults in contexts with great contrasts between rich and poor (Leinaweaver 2005, Weismantel 1995). This has also been observed in lowland Ecuador (Wamsley 2008) and other countries (e.g. Goody 1982, Fonseca 1986, Dahl 1990, Bowie 2004, Alber 2004). Studying adoptions in Peru, Leinaweaver remains critical of the assumptions underlying care in studies of transnational families, as an expression like 'a guardian raising a child' is 'misleading' because it 'obscures the social and economic interdependence of adults and children' (Leinaweaver 2010:74, see also 2008). She claims that a migrant leaving his or her own child to a grandparent represents one way in which the migrating adult is caring for the elderly parent staying behind, and is not just a case of a grandparent taking care of a child (Leinaweaver 2010). In other words, the relationship is reciprocal.

In making an account for the persistence of relations of mutual dependence, Miles observed in her study of poor families in South Ecuador that children themselves 'were not encouraged to be independent', but 'to be mindful of others and their connections to them' (2004:119). In another article the author claims that beyond 'instrumental purposes', children's housework 'solidifies family relationships by emphasising cooperation and reciprocity' (Miles 1994:142, see also Pribilsky 2001:260-261). Underlining cooperation and a two-way relationship between adults and children directs attention away from children as burdens. Weismantel also contributes to this argument when she observes that while being useful in household tasks, young children are also 'one of the greatest reasons that life is worth living' and 'nobody wants to live in a house without children' (1998:170), a point that Pribilsky also finds relevant in his study of children with migrant fathers (2001). These mutual relations of children and adults and the children's duties to reciprocate, must be

considered seriously when women leave to work abroad. Through sharing care, adults construct relations of mutual support with children and with other adults, within and beyond their homes. The relation between adults and children in general, intergenerational relations, are expressed in the idiom of exchange and duty.

Research on adoption and fosterage in Andean countries has found that when parents allow others to raise their child, it is because it is considered beneficial for the child's future (e.g. Leinaweaver 2010, 2008, Weismantel 1995, Wamsley 2008, see also Swanson 2007). The child is often handed over to people who are better off than the parents, and in the case of poor families from the rural areas, they may hope that their child will receive an education or grow up in an urban environment. For instance, a middle-class urban acquaintance in Ecuador who had informally adopted a child from a poor woman in the lowlands told me 'the proper way' to explain to the child's mother that she was interested in raising one of the latter's many children: 'You have to tell her, "I will give him an education, a good school", and then you do that'. She expressed this as the most persuasive argument that can be used to get a parent to agree to let a child be raised by other adults. Moreover, scholars have also observed that giving away a child is a way to establish or strengthen alliances across social classes (Leinaweaver 2007) or between rural and urban areas (Wamsley 2008). In this context, in order to reinforce ties between biological and foster parents it is necessary to keep regular contact through visits and mutual services.

Local understandings of *compadrazgo* (co-parenthood) are amply present in Latin America and rooted in pre-colonial and Catholic traditions (Mintz and Wolf 1950). *Compadrazgo* (and *comadrazgo*) is a relationship in which the biological parents name another couple as *compadres* (*comadre*, *compadre*) and make them symbolically, and sometimes practically, responsible should the parents die or lack the resources to sustain their child. The *ahijado/a* (godson, goddaughter) is the child through whom the connection is created. The *compadre* or *comadre* become the *padrino* or *madrina* to the child. Commitments of adults to raise and protect the children of another person can sometimes be established by a religious ritual of baptism, first communion, or simply by an agreement between family and friends. In some cases, children move to another adult's home (Leinaweaver 2008, Wamsley 2008, Fonseca 1986). Mostly, the commitment means that the adults will take responsibility if the parents are not present.

The relation essentially constitutes a way of confirming, widening and strengthening existing social ties (Widmark 2003:124-125).

The common practice of co-parenthood offers a possibility to understand that children can be left in the care of other adults, and that responsibility for them may circulate among different individuals, without it being conceived in terms of abandonment. This is not to say that these practices totally prevent the pain of separation and criticism of mothers who leave children behind. But these practices of sharing care are in any case relevant in understanding transnational female migration, which is more likely to happen in contexts in which notions of family are not solely subjected to the nuclear family form. In particular, the tasks of mothering are imagined to be assumed by different women. Practices of co-parenthood and fostering are basically processes of constructing webs of protection, not only for children, but also for the elderly who risk remaining alone, and as Weismantel observes, even for adults who for different reasons, do not have their own children (1995, see also Dahl 1990).⁶¹

When adults migrate transnationally and for long periods of time the same logic is at work. Parents ensure that their left behind child will be protected during their absence, while this same child is left to help and accompany the adult in question. However, some basic issues must be specified in circumstances of transnational migration. Migrant parents can often afford daily expenses and may be or may become better off than those who stay behind with their children. Seeing these relations in forms of mutual support, it can be observed that while individuals take responsibility for the children of migrants, these adults might in turn get company and assistance, hopes for migration, access to loans, gifts and remittances from the migrant parents, or simply the possibility of being part of the social network beyond Ecuador. Another difference from local adoptions is that due to geographical distance and high costs of travelling migrant parents may not visit frequently. In both cases, adults with children may construct strong affective ties and find meaning in their lives of mutual caring over many years, and this may become a source of conflict when it is time for reunification. A final difference is that it is more frequently close kin such as grandparents or siblings that take on the responsibility of raising the child. The broader logic concerning co-

⁶¹ Among Borana people, Dahl has observed that elderly women acting as 'boarding mothers' get practical assistance as well as preserve their status quo by bringing up other adults' children (1990:133-134).

parenting (and godparenting) and expansive forms of care, however, holds true in this context as well.

In the next section I will describe these relations in some more detail, by beginning with the interdependence between grandmothers (*las abuelitas*), grandchildren (*nietos y nietas*), and absent migrant mothers, and how those involved individuals interpret their connections between daily obligation and joy.

Abuelitas, grandmothers' commitments

Writing about Zumbagua, a poor Ecuadorian indigenous community in the rural Andes, Weismantel states that 'shame comes from leaving elderly parents without young people to help around the house and to bring joy to it' (1998:170). In the same sense, love, respect and feelings of shame and obligation may lead adults to care for their elderly, but leaving a child with a lonely grandmother just to keep her company may not be the preferred option for urban families with available resources, since children's education is a priority. More frequently, depending on the health of an elderly parent, the grandmother may move between different children's homes or stay in a daughter's house. Another option is that an adult child moves to the house of the elderly parent, thus taking the chance to accompany him or her and to save some money from renting another place. In the Ecuadorian context, where most elderly people have neither a pension nor social security, it is the children's obligation to provide company and economic support to their parents.

Scholars have demonstrated that grandmothers are the main actors in sustaining transnational caring relations, especially in their roles of staying behind with their grandchildren (see for instance Bastia 2009, Yarris 2014, 2017). What the grandmothers may do depends on their age, available time and level of education. A poor grandmother in Guayaquil, for example, said that one thing she could not do for her eight-year-old grandson was to help him with his homework because she had not gone to school herself. Therefore, his migrant mother paid for private lessons to supplement the child's education. The grandmother expressed her feelings about the constant presence of her grandson with these words: 'He is my companion (*mi compañero*). At night I would feel lonely because my husband works as a security

guard. Seeing my grandson beside me gives me confidence (*confianza*).’ She perceived the child not only as someone to care for, but also as her companion. The grandson even symbolised protection for her: ‘Since he is with me, I’m not afraid anymore’. Involved in care either by their own decision, or because the migrants did not have another choice, or because of the pleasures and needs of having company and support, grandmothers become a decisive part of this dynamic of transnational caregiving.

Sometimes grandmothers want to keep a child longer than the migrant parents intended, as Anita did with Karen and Ruth in the introductory vignette, suggesting that the granddaughters should remain with her permanently. In the context of international migration to Spain, however, parents said they tried to cut down this time of absence by returning or reuniting. In contrast to traditions of fostering in which children are given away for ‘a better future’ than they are expected to get with their biological parents, migrating parents are often able to pay for their children’s education, health care, and housing.

After many years of living together the separation between grandmothers and children becomes painful for both, creating among children ambiguous feelings about departure, as has been also observed in other contexts (Yarris 2014). Grandmothers may develop the desire to keep the children with them even though they know they will have to send them to their migrant parents ‘some day’. Reunification poses the new question of who will care for the grandmother. Some families found a solution by bringing grandmothers to Spain, since family reunification with parents was allowed there.⁶² Sometimes children do what Aracely’s son did (Chapter 1): decide to remain with his grandmother in his familiar environment in Ecuador. In other cases, grandmothers who have been acting as caregivers have opted to go to Barcelona themselves, with the stated purpose of bringing the children to their parents. They may stay there short or long periods, explaining that they missed their grandchildren or that their own adult children need help. In the latter case, grandmothers take the chance of staying as babysitters to facilitate the working life of their adult children. In other cases, grandmothers migrate themselves first in order to explore new ways to support their families.

⁶² Reunification of a parent in Spain is not as open as before. New changes in migration policy, *Ley de Extranjería* 2009, delimited the right to bring family members in the ascendant line, that is, parents and grandparents.

Emperatriz (see the Appendix), in her middle sixties with adult children and grandchildren in Las Palmas and Barcelona, often expressed her anxieties about helping her family, both economically and with her presence, but was convinced that she was never doing enough. Her two daughters in Las Palmas described proudly that her mother never left small children waiting for her as other women did, but that all the siblings were already adults at the time of her migration. Emperatriz travelled to Ecuador as often as resources allowed, but she also accumulated mountains of clothes and textiles in her room to be sent when opportunities appeared. She was diligent in gathering a good amount of bedclothes to provide her younger unemployed son the opportunity to start a business in Ecuador. With a permanent feeling of not doing enough, Emperatriz and all grandmothers I met during fieldwork in Ecuador and Barcelona expressed strong desires to stay longer with their grandchildren, sometimes even against the wishes of their own children. Grandmothers played imaginatively with new ways of reuniting with some of their grandchildren in Barcelona or taking others born in Spain back to Ecuador. Emperatriz, for example, repeatedly joked about her newborn grandson: '*Me lo voy a robar!*' (I will steal him). Gloria, who hoped to reunite the whole family in Barcelona, mused: 'I want my *niños* here in Barcelona. Seeing them here will convince my daughter to move [here] too'.

In daily life in Ecuador, when a young mother goes to work, it is considered normal and necessary to leave the child with her own mother. There are of course grandmothers who work outside of the home and have no time or may reject this role, but even younger generations may still expect grandmothers to be there as support. Importantly, grandmothers will expect to be asked to care for children too, sometimes competing with other grandparents for opportunities to spend time with grandchildren in common. I met a group of young women amenably chatting while waiting to be interviewed for their visas in the door of the embassy of Spain in Quito. They had already signed work contracts in Barcelona. I asked them what their mothers said about their going to work in Spain. They laughed and one of them said a bit carelessly: 'Nothing, what can they say? It's time, go, go, do something, don't stay only at home. She is happy I got this job [in Spain], it was my mother herself who found this ad in the newspaper and showed it to me, she encouraged me to search for this job'. Since some of them revealed that they had small children, I asked, 'What about your child?' One of them replied: 'My daughter has always

stayed with my mother every day, she calls my mother *mami*, and my father *papi*. She calls me by name. I hope that she will miss me a little when I move to Spain'. This almost careless way of speaking about leaving a child without showing big worries must be understood not only in the continuation of the grandparents' care and that these young mothers trust in their parents, but also in relation to the circumstances in which Ecuadorians perceived moving to Spain as an open door for the whole family.

From the perspective of grandmothers, assuming responsibilities for grandchildren is taken as the most significant kind of help a mother can offer a working daughter. 'How could I deny my daughter help if she asks for it?' wonders a grandmother in Ecuador, thinking about the situation of her young daughter going back to work after four months of paid maternity leave. In order to engage grandmothers or other relatives, however, a long female absence must be arranged within the framework of the family commitment, which involves keeping alive the feelings of solidarity and shared obligation, as well as frequent economic support. Otherwise, leaving the child behind could be considered simply as abandonment. Mothers abroad, who do not send remittances, do not call and do not show efforts to reunite with their children, risk being left out of the family support. A young man in Guayaquil explained that his cousins 'did not recognise their mother as such anymore' because during all the years she lived in Spain and Italy she had not sent money or presents, nor did she try to reunite with any of the children. 'Now, when she comes on a visit, she has to stay with her sister, I mean, my mother, not with her own children', this man stated. This illustrates the comparable importance of showing affect and dedication with words as well as in material terms, or at least with intentions to do something important, for instance, through reunification or the construction of a house, as seen in Chapter 3 with Gloria's case. Communication, material items, and shared stories of a future together are compulsory components of transnational care.

With all the attempts to remain together, transnational life involves serious risks of breaking the affective bonds of parents and children. Migrants recognised the importance of having someone who they could really rely on in the home country in order to minimize these risks. For example, I was told by a woman in her forties (a friend of Celia) about her own struggles to regain her two daughters' love, since her ex-husband and father of the two girls had permanently 'talked badly' about her because she had remarried in Barcelona. 'He never

forgave me, though we were separated before I left, and he was not in charge of the girls. Moreover, everyone knew I married a friend, only to get the papers', she said. When remittances and reunion are delayed, it is critical to have a good partnership with the person in charge of the children and the household. Migrant women claimed that the best partner to leave children with was their own mother or an eldest daughter if possible, who understood better the difficulties of sending money or trying to reunite. Then, the worries were more likely to be diminished and not transmitted to children in terms of abandonment.

In the next section, I will discuss some features of this love and care at a distance, a difficult process of synchronising transnational lives. I emphasise that individuals interpret and react differently to distance, depending on their current circumstances, and ideals of love and family life. I use Beck's (2011) expression 'global love' to emphasise that distance can be viewed as a common way of life under contemporary capitalism in which the labour force is highly mobile. Global love, however, requires intensive daily communication and coordination of emotional and instrumental issues.

Managing 'global love'

Ulrich Beck points out that 'in past times love was about staying together', but argues that for migrant domestic workers in the global era 'love is about leaving' (Beck 2011). To understand that love is about leaving we need to see it as more than an abstract idealized inner feeling, but also in terms of forms of material exchange through remittances. In studies of transnational families, it has been observed that people's understanding of care or love determines how migration influences their lives (Coe 2011). Important factors to be considered among transnational families are the limitations of the nuclear family, and the feelings involved in managing distance and absence, often expressed through the idiom of exchange. Beyond sending remittances, the acts of making calls, giving advice, sending gifts, or demonstrating the intention to reunite family members nurture affective ties and make it meaningful to keep a place in the home for those absent. Mutual exchanges of favours, things and money and the

maintenance of emotional ties are thus intimately interrelated. 'Sending dollars shows feeling' (McKay 2007). Parents who give material things are thus not substituting love; rather, they are giving love through those things, as in the case of the house discussed in the previous chapter. The fact that a parent leaves his or her children in the care of others in order to provide for them can be broadly accepted, respected and even encouraged within families (see for example Coe 2014). Seeing 'intimate and economic relations as deeply intertwined', 'children and adults understand feelings to be expressed through the distribution of material resources' (2011:8-9).

This association of love and material provision must be recognised as contingent on time and on what kind of lifestyles individuals aspire to in the different phases of their lives. As time goes by, and such basic needs as food and health are covered, individuals of different ages will aspire to new things: a comfortable house, better schools, face-to-face relations with parents, and other lifestyles associated with higher social status.

When great geographical distance becomes daily life, parents struggle with finding the proper ways of expressing their feelings and emotions, showing themselves responsible by sending money and gifts without becoming 'too material', as well as struggling with predominant ideals of family and sociality. Mothers, especially, confront daily the generalised negative assumptions about 'the separation of the nuclear family', which involves the tendency to idealise daily face-to-face presence. In Ecuador, media reports, psychologists and government officials create tensions concerning absentee mothers 'who abandon their children' but are valued as migrants and workers 'sending remittances'. Migrant mothers try to diminish these tensions by imagining and explaining separation as a temporary condition, revealed through the expression 'two years' (*dos añitos*) among my informants. Moreover, when mothers say, 'I left my children to give them a better life', they place this sentiment in inevitable interaction with a world of material things and the importance of justifying the decision to leave.

Individuals do carry the scars of living at a distance, though shared narratives of returning or reuniting help to alleviate tensions. Mothers might feel ashamed and guilty, hoping that someday their children will understand that 'they were left behind for their own better future'. Moreover, different practical understandings of love and family life play into what helps alleviate tensions. People who see themselves in multiple family forms and extended family networks may maintain

more open and complex family links, accepting and expecting a wider diversity of individuals to drop in and help with care tasks. Traditions of godparenthood and sharing care among women of different generations contribute other referential frameworks in which parents' absence can be understood.

Moreover, intimate relations over a distance imply particular ways of expressing emotions in a delicately managed manner, sometimes even a self-obligation to stay silent or of hiding information from a distance. A mother explained to me that while calling from Barcelona to Ecuador, 'I don't cry on the phone because she [her daughter] also cries there. I want to avoid that'. A daughter in Ecuador reveals that 'I don't tell her [the mother in Barcelona] everything because she gets worried. I tell her only what is strictly necessary, otherwise she wants to come. That doesn't help'. Such tactical avoiding of expressing strong emotions is also about care and love. People are not neglecting care in these cases. These suppressions and silences constitute a painful way of trying to save the other from suffering at a distance, in circumstances when they do not know when they will meet again. Of course, hiding details of daily life or suppressing emotions can also bring strain and confusion. Daughters and mothers located in different countries for many years do not always share definitions of what is 'absolutely necessary to tell'. With the impossibility of regular travel, relationships of permanent separation are likely to work better in the long-term if the participants keep in regular contact, but this requires lots of energy, time and money. An example of how to keep alive this global love was Marta, who remembered periods when she spent at least 300 Euro per month—half her income—on phone cards, *locutorio* calls and mobile phone bills, costs that fortunately decreased with the introduction of online technologies.

Mobile phones, prepaid cards, Skype, *locutorios*, and more recently social media, all supplement bodily expressions of feelings. Technologies that connect people become a crucial part of migrant life and act as 'the social glue of migrant transnationalism' (Vertovec 2004). Technologies, however, facilitate but also constrain the form and content of communication, creating other exigencies for individuals. Especially important is that technologies demand the daily work of individuals, long hours watching their phones, keeping ears and eyes wide awake, adapting to time differences between Ecuador and Spain, and hunting for the best prices for mobile phones. This concrete expression of individuals' commitment to the family life, an intensive life of managing feelings, of keeping themselves in a

state of mind of watchfulness on both sides of the Atlantic, is what Madianou calls ‘ambient co-presence’, ‘the prevalence of an “always on” culture of ubiquitous continuity’ (2016). With new forms of communication, absence of beloved ones can be relieved, but also, this can augment possibilities for control on both sides—care goes together with surveillance (Johnson and Lindquist 2019). So-called global love may not be such a peaceful lifestyle to which individuals smoothly accommodate their routines and feelings. People have to work hard with the coordination of how to show or hide feelings, and with the routines of sharing care at homes. The perpetuation of affective ties would not be possible without the intensive participation of different individuals in the shared family commitment and in the daily performances of attentiveness.

Girls: caring and being cared for

This section describes the dynamic participation of girls in the maintenance of caring relations. Ruth, the youngest left-behind child of Gloria, was the object of love and the reason for the connection between the adults around her, but she also facilitated the lives of those adults. This transformed her into an active caregiver. If she were to migrate, she would also leave a void of care behind.

Ruth was twelve years old when I first met her, and seven years had already passed since her mother Gloria had left her at the house of her older sister Karen and grandmother Anita. All involved knew that this arrangement was considered temporary as Ruth would hopefully be reunited with her parents in Barcelona. That Sunday when I first met her, Ruth looked happy to see her relatives in Karen’s house again, having spent the past months with her other sister Lucy in the countryside in the coastal province of Manabí. Ruth was especially fascinated by Karen’s little daughter (*la bebe*). *La bebe* could not be happier to be close to someone else. Still learning to walk, she tried with difficulty to follow Ruth everywhere. Karen felt relaxed because Ruth was back and could help. She was busy preparing lunch, grandmother Anita was dedicated to the laundry, the men were watching a football match on TV with beers in their hands, while Lucy and I were chatting beside them. Ruth was slim, her skin pale and delicate. She did not seem to have spent much time under the

coastal sun. Her body shape was accentuated by her tight blue jeans and the t-shirt that I imagined she carefully chose every day among the many pieces of clothing that her mother sent from Barcelona after hunting for the best prices.

‘So you must be Ruth’, I said to her in front of Lucy, feeling like I already had known them for a long time. I had been talking with them on the phone and I also knew them through the long conversations with Ruth’s parents in Barcelona before my arrival in Guayaquil. Ruth timidly and respectfully replied, ‘*Yeah, buenas tardes* (good afternoon)’. Soon she disappeared to take *la bebe* in her arms, while Lucy proudly commented to me: ‘Now she’s grown up (*tiene más cuerpo*), you know, there in the countryside (*en el campo*) with good food, milk, plantains. Everything is fresh there’. In this way, Lucy was explaining that she had been taking care of Ruth in the right way, perhaps better than she was cared for in Guayaquil at Karen’s house, where Ruth frequently was ill, it was said, from fatty food. It was well-known that Lucy and Karen did not always have smooth relations. Sometimes it looked like Karen competed with Lucy for the attention of the mother in Barcelona. Lucy, Karen and their brother Jimmy worried that something would go wrong when caring for Ruth. As mentioned earlier, the other brother had died in Gloria and Pepe’s absence, a topic they seldom talked about. Both the parents and siblings were marked by this tragedy and strove to do their best with Ruth as they attempted to regenerate some harmony. The siblings lived in this slippery terrain between their commitments to care for Ruth ‘properly’, their limitations because they were not the parents, and the fears of potential tragedies like that of the other brother.

Since Ruth was coming of age, becoming ‘*a señorita*’,⁶³ Lucy said, caring for her was a great preoccupation. ‘I don’t want something bad to happen to her, perhaps that a man abuses her, you know? I think she has to be with our parents because she is grown now’. It wasn’t just Lucy who perceived that Ruth was at risk of being abused at home. A neighbour was also worried about Ruth ‘playing in the bed’ with her cousin, ‘an older boy’, she underlined in a tone of gossip. Although Ruth was in Lucy’s care, she was not 100 per cent so, the latter repeatedly emphasised, drawing a limit between disciplining one’s

⁶³ Lucy pointed to this important transition for girls when the most dangerous risk is considered to become pregnant or become sexually abused. In many Latin American countries, becoming 15 years old, and the corresponding *fiesta rosada* (pink fiesta), are still the social markers of a girl becoming a *señorita*, a young female adult. A young woman who is no longer a child is, at the occasion of her *fiesta rosada*, presented to the broader society.

own children and disciplining a younger sister. In practice, this boundary is not always fixed. Older sisters may become stricter than biological mothers are, while parents at a distance or on a visit may indulge them (*miman*). Pedone and Gil Araujo describe an Ecuadorian migrant mother telling her daughter who was looking after her younger siblings: You're *la madrastra*' (stepmother)⁶⁴ (2008:53).

Although Lucy and Karen did not always get along, when we had an elaborate weekend meal Lucy worried about saving a portion for Karen's home. Karen lived close to us and came some evenings to visit together with her baby and grandmother Anita. While Ruth entertained the baby, we could chat and Karen got some rest from her mothering task after work. Karen otherwise spent the evenings with the baby and Anita, while her husband worked outside the home. On occasion Lucy carried *la bebe* to the doctor for her special respiratory treatment because Karen was at work. To do so, Lucy left her own children in Ruth's care for some hours. At the time, Ruth had finished elementary school and was frequently at home. Furthermore, since Lucy did not have a job yet, she had assigned herself the responsibility to take grandmother Anita to a specialised doctor for an eye problem.⁶⁵

With this mutual support the gift of care circulated among women of different ages, strengthening their relations. When Lucy left Karen a good portion of her plantain soup (*sopa de verde*), she happily accepted since it was not only 'the taste from the coast and the family', but also, she did not need to prepare a dinner that evening, which saved her time, energy and money. While men often delighted in sharing beers, for women, it was special delicacies prepared by themselves that were important to nurture social and affective ties. These kinds of offerings helped sisters feel closer, and improved their relations. The exchange of gifts and the distribution of caring responsibilities were made spontaneously, depending on who was available, who had no job or was at home.

The other practice of sharing care that I highlight in the next section is the assumption that 'a daughter replaces the mother', what families often call '*la mano derecha*' (the right hand), usually the oldest

⁶⁴ In Ecuador the *madrastra* (stepmother) is popularly associated with conflicting relationships. People also use the word *madrastra* or *padrastra* to refer to someone who is too harsh and disciplining.

⁶⁵ At that time a medical caravan with Cuban doctors specialised in ophthalmic problems had been temporarily stationed in the neighbouring province of Santa Helena. They could operate on Anita at no cost.

daughter (*la hija mayor*). As with the grandmother's care, the relation is based on mutual loyalty. When leaving, issues of trust and loyalty become critical. As happens in the grandmother's care (*el cuidado de la abuelita*), the management of money and sharing of intimate information is common. A daughter, however, is said to be particularly good at managing the 'red tape' (*trámites*) related to processes of reunification, starting a business, or constructing or refurbishing a house.

The gift economy and 'the right hand'

This section shows how intimacy and loyalty are crucial for the mobility of care. Whatever the form of care—remittances, favours, gifts or information—it is activated through women who feel faithful to each other and is then further distributed. Relations of this kind may vary depending on the individuals' responses when they are assigned a responsibility.

The relations of women of different ages—Ruth, Lucy, Karen, Anita—were not free of conflicts, but they depended on each other to cope with daily life. The one needed the other at different times for different tasks, while Gloria worked in Barcelona, called, sent remittances and made loans when necessary, in the hope of securing harmony and the expansion of responsibility. Commitments among family members remaining in Ecuador were stimulated with economic resources from migration. Centred on Ruth, remittances came to Karen when Ruth lived at her home, and to Lucy when the girl moved there. They would continue to Lucy when the focus was on refurbishing the house. When one received help, whatever its form, this created a moral debt that had to be returned in the form of another service or favour, or simply, by offering time that could ease the responsibilities of the other. This recalls the kind of 'generalised reciprocity' described by Sahlins (1972), because there are no exigencies or expectations of immediate return, and there are no specified ways of repaying, in quality or quantity. Among these women there is an expectation of repayment, not immediately but as needs arise.

There was doubt in this family, however, about the quality of care that Ruth received when she was at Karen's home. Lucy had gotten

married and was not there to see what happened. The brother Jimmy complained that they had ‘small conflicts’ (*problemas*), so much so that he strongly desired for he and Ruth to move out and live together without Karen. But he could not do it because, as he said, ‘With whom would the girl stay when I went to work?’ Pepe, Karen’s stepfather, was a bit disappointed since he had loaned 800 US dollars to Karen to renovate her own little house, but this had not been done and the money had not been repaid. Gloria recognised that she wanted Lucy to have been there all her years of absence, remarking that ‘she is so quick to solve everything’. Everybody needed Lucy and longed for her, but she had stayed in another province. Undoubtedly, the expectations on Lucy were too high.

Gloria told me in Barcelona about the hopes they had placed on Lucy years ago, because she had such great business abilities:

‘At 15 she was already successfully managing a pharmacy in downtown Guayaquil. Imagine, we wanted to have our own business with her, of course, she’s so good at that, but she suddenly got married. Pepe was so sad and disappointed, because she was the apple of his eye (*la niña de sus ojos*). Therefore, with all these pains he decided to come to Barcelona with the ticket that initially was bought for Lucy. Before she married, we knew Lucy was in love with that guy, but we didn’t imagine she could marry so young!’

Confirming her abilities, Lucy also, together with Ruth and me, rapidly organised the long trip to Quito to arrange the passport and the visa that Ruth needed to get to Spain.

A decisive factor that made Lucy ‘a right hand’, the woman of trust in the family (*la mujer de confianza de la familia*), was her persistent loyalty to her parents and determination to assume the latter’s responsibility. When I first met her, she had decided to leave her in-laws in the province of Manabí to move to Paraíso to live with her siblings, and to search for a job. She described to me that she wanted ‘to be there, to care for and to control’ the siblings (*para cuidarlos y controlarlos*); after all, she said, she was ‘a person from the city’. ‘What was I to do in *el campo* (in the countryside?)’ she asked rhetorically. She emphasised her worries for Jimmy and Ruth, arguing the need to support and accompany them. She also had to argue with her husband to leave the in-law-parents’ house, because she ‘did not see a future there’, and ‘could not find a job there’. The promise of her

parents to support her efforts had also been appealing. Marital problems with scarce economic resources had not been the best way to remain in the countryside. Lucy was loyal to her parents, and expected parental help as well, as she was highly committed to them. She told me many times: ‘I don’t want them to give me a lot of money, because I’m already on another account (*otra cuenta*). All I want is a reasonable amount of money (5000 dollars) to start my pharmacy’.⁶⁶

‘Another account’ meant she had become an independent married adult, with her own family and children. She was no longer a burden to her parents, but her commitment to her family continued. A special characteristic of a ‘right hand’ is that she must have a personal vision for improvement in life. He or she should not only expect to be dependent on the migrant parents but also show initiative and entrepreneurship, and progress towards economic independence for the sake of the family. Thus, the more economic support an adult child gets from migrant parents, the more time and energy he or she dedicates to them. Conversely, others who received less attention or fewer gifts could become disappointed and even constitute a headache for the distributions of resources and responsibilities. Migrants and their right hands always had to manage these emerging conflicts.

In the economy of the gift, trust and loyalty among women signals the route through which care is more likely to circulate. A right hand, the proper support at the right time, is always necessary for one to be able to leave one’s home and to put care on the move. This right hand is created amidst each family’s particular history. A caring right hand can be also a disciplining (even punishing) hand in regard to the rest of the family. Often a woman, the right hand alleviates the family worries around the organisation of the home and the relations at a distance. The assumption that a woman ‘is there’ in case of need, however, is hardly uncomplicated. In the next section I want to show how this availability is part of the construction of the ideal woman—the committed, sacrificing woman who in practice struggles with her own time, longing for someone who can assist her. I present the busy lives of Mireya and Lucy, two women in charge of the households that had been left by their mothers. We will see how they organise daily life in order to ‘be there’.

⁶⁶ The large amount of money Lucy mentions shows that at that moment, she had no clear idea of her parents’ economic situation in Barcelona, where gathering 5000 US dollars to send could require from parents that they get a credit from the bank. With Spain’s falling into economic crisis, this would show to be impossible.

Struggles of ‘being there’

Mireya was a midwife (*obstetrix*) at the local hospital and a schoolteacher in her hometown, Las Palmas. She was also studying for a master’s degree in the University of Guayaquil and had a small pharmacy (*botiquín*) on the ground floor of her house, which she opened in the evening. Like her mother Emperatriz, who lived in Barcelona, Mireya was a Jehovah’s Witness and went to bible study once a week. Doctor Mireya, as people called her, was responsible for all the affairs her mother had left behind when she went to Barcelona during 1990s, including her father. Mireya shared her mother’s house with her ten-year-old daughter, her husband, an adult younger brother (and sometimes his partner with a little child), and her father (divorced from her mother). Mireya read her books late in the night and woke up early in the morning to organise with the *empleada* the rest of the day. She also prepared the clothes for her husband and daughter and checked that her father wore a proper outfit. She rigorously drew the limits for her father and her brother when they went to drink with friends and came home late in the night. She was very strong and a multitasker, but would never have been able to juggle her activities if it was not for her *empleada*, a poor relative from the countryside working and living in the home, who cleaned, did the laundry, bought the ingredients and prepared the meals. However, on those days when the *empleada* remained with her own family because a child was sick or when severe rains had made it impossible to get to the town, Mireya’s home was chaotic. The husband solved this problem by ‘escaping’ from his job at the local municipality and buying lunch and dinner at the closest restaurant, allowing for Mireya to attend to her patients at the hospital and her students at the local school.

Lucy—Pepe and Gloria’s daughter— with her desires of starting her own pharmacy at home in Paraíso, explained that she had experience for this business but no relevant formal education. She saw it as the best way of combining responsibilities at work and home. In her business, Lucy could have her two small children close to her when they came back from school. ‘Nobody can take care of children like the mother, a mother never sleeps, while the others can do it without worries’ (*con la pierna cruzada*). She saw no other solution to her situation, unless her own mother would be there and not in Barcelona, as was now the case. She said that she missed a mother’s

hand and the permanent advice of her wise and experienced parents. Fortunately, the earlier lack of communication had improved once she moved from the countryside of Manabí to Paraíso. With a mobile phone (and a functioning local coverage, *cobertura*), she could receive her mother's calls at least weekly. Additionally, living in Paraíso, she could frequently call Barcelona from *una cabina* (a small internet and phone call centre) located at a nearby corner of the barrio.

While Lucy many times confirmed her commitment to be close to her children daily, she also tried to find someone whom she could trust to watch her children. She evaluated the women close to her, like her sister Karen, her grandmother Anita, and Bélgica, the neighbour who identified herself as 'almost like a mother'. For Lucy, nobody seemed appropriate. Leaving her children in somebody else's hands was a difficult choice when her own mother was not there. If she left the responsibility to her husband, he would surely delegate the children to her mother-in-law, an environment in which Lucy thought the kids might be spoiled. Worse, they could be obliged to live far away from her in another province. Another option for Lucy could be Ruth, but she would probably be moving to Barcelona. Her husband, still unemployed, came to visit weekly, but remained mostly in the countryside helping his parents. Lucy was developing her own care deficit.

In a situation of uncertain income and lack of public services and care for children and the elderly, an option for women is to start their own businesses attached to their homes as an opportunity to give care and make an income in the same place. Forty per cent of women in Ecuador are independent entrepreneurs (INEC 2011). Women with their own business also said that in this way they are their 'own bosses', avoiding the hierarchies of company offices. With expanding activities and a growing number of clients women will need helping hands to cope with all tasks. When I met Lucy in 2011, she had finally started her pharmacy with a loan from a local bank and the 500 US dollar gift from her parents. It was going well, she said, but because she was very busy, she had *una chica* (a girl) to help her at home. The business allowed Lucy to rapidly move between her roles of mother, spouse and entrepreneur-worker but did not give her enough earnings, she recognised later. After a while, she left the pharmacy in the hands of her sister Karen and took a job as manager at a local restaurant, where she earned additional income and could gain another kind of experience. In this way, Karen could also work close to home and keep an eye on the children and the grandmother.

The continuity of access to a female helper was clearly problematic, but women with resources and no time depended on the support of their *empleadas*. They longed for the ‘right girl’ or the ‘little elderly woman’ to trust. However, in a context where *empleadas* are poorly paid, they are often looking for better opportunities. Moreover, common accusations of stealing small items or ‘being lazy’ or ‘dirty’ complicated labour relations at home. The pool of available helping hands was also not bottomless. The stories of Mireya and Lucy show that the common assumption that daughters are available, that ‘they are there’ to ‘replace the mother’ makes sense in the ideals of family life, but in practice this availability is hard to construct daily, and is often temporary and precarious, and costs money. It is difficult to offer support without extreme sacrifices and the pressures of daily life, even ‘self-exploitation’. The solutions are often improvised as the problems emerge. Home-based business and *empleadas* are strongly desired to sustain family life and for the reproduction of female commitments. In another way, by being available to cover all the obligations that their migrant mothers should manage, these daughters got some advantages and extra support.

Women like Mireya and Lucy created daily possibilities to ‘be there’, to support their migrant mothers as far as possible. Sometimes this family commitment clashed with imaginations of how life could be without these obligations. For women like Lucy with unpredictable incomes this aspiration was not possible, as it could be for Mireya who—after many years living at her mother Emperatriz’s house—soon would move to her own new house with her husband and their daughter. Women could at times feel divided between the choice of attending to a partner or husband and creating a nuclear family, or being part of the ‘united family’ that together survives the controversies of life.

Romantic relationships and family commitments

I asked Gloria why she did not leave her children with her daughter Lucy instead of Karen when she migrated. It was after all Lucy who was clearly the preferred option, who seemed to be the most responsible and trusted, *la mano derecha*. Gloria replied: ‘No, I couldn’t, because she gave birth to her first child when I left. It’s difficult you know, with a little newborn’. Fortunately, she could

count on the combined efforts of her own mother with her other daughter Karen. In trying to share care with a young daughter, marriage partners may face obstacles, sometimes experienced as threats to intergenerational alliances. Newly married daughters with small babies were not considered to be available. They had become busy with their own lives, their own commitments.

In Barcelona, women could feel that their family commitments might be put at risk if they married or remarried. Obligations and devotion to family, especially to an elderly lonely mother or poor siblings and nephews, encouraged some women to postpone or avoid marriage and remarriage. Katy, a friend of Betty, who sublet a room to her in her apartment, said that she had delayed marriage and avoided falling in love. The reason, she said, was that she had been very busy working in Guayaquil. When her father died, she decided to migrate to Barcelona in order to work and to sustain her elderly mother economically. Her sister was already married and had her own children (*su compromiso*), so she could not do it. Thus, the only available child to help their mother was herself, because she was single, she had no commitment yet (*Todavía no se ha hecho de compromiso*). ‘Do you think that if my dad was alive, he would allow me to come here?’ Katy asked, looking at me as if I had not understood the point. At 32 years of age, she wanted to find a partner and have a child, feeling strongly that soon it would be too late for her. She looked forward to finding her life’s companion, preferably someone who would not be an obstacle to caring for her mother back in Guayaquil. She needed someone who understood this situation.

Another migrant woman in her late thirties, a friend of Celia, said that she did not want to get engaged or into a serious relationship. She described herself as satisfied with ‘a half-boyfriend’ (*un medio enamorado*) who did not want to get married but kept visiting her regularly. Her female friends were opposed to this arrangement since they expected a woman to have a ‘serious relationship’. How she could prefer such a kind of partner? But the friends later understood her position when she explained to us her family’s situation. Because her siblings were poor, she felt that her priority was to help them. ‘If you become dependent on a man [move in together or get married] you can’t do that, because you have to fulfil the obligations and attend to him first, right? (*Tienes que atenderlo a él primero no?*)’. Emperatriz, divorced in her middle sixties, had similar worries. Although she admitted having many ‘suitors’ (*pretendientes*), her priority was sending money to her family. She sent presents for all

grandchildren and daughters, and worried especially about her young unemployed son and her little grandson born with cerebral palsy. She said she believed a new man in her life might not allow that. Actually, many other women who had found their partners abroad had described their strong disagreements about sending money or not, to whom and how much the limit should be. Many examples show women's persistent family loyalty, and that things worked better when the man came from the same country. This was particularly true if the woman had desires of returning or sending the children back for long periods or on holidays. The practices of sharing care were open possibilities for these families. When they consider themselves part of three generations of women, it involves both a world of responsibilities and multiple possibilities for support. Forming a new partnership with a man, however, could become an obstacle for female alliances and for the reproduction of care over the long term, though the presence of a male partner is still considered important for a home to be respected by others, and as an additional source of income.

The transnational gift of care

This chapter has dealt with daily practices of sharing care between generations of women within households in Ecuador, in connection to other households and in relation to the maintenance of transnational relations of caregiving and care receiving. The experiences of 'replacing a mother' and the permanent exchanges of care go beyond the time of migration to Spain. It has been argued that Ecuadorian women can migrate because they can count on others to take on their responsibilities of caring. This is part of the global care chain, yet far more complex than the simple assumption that care is in deficit in the country of origin. As we have seen in this chapter, there are various forms of support and intimacy in which women are pivotal agents supported by long-standing practices such as fostering and co-parenthood, as well as grandmothers' care, and 'loyal daughters'. They have largely offered the possibility to think of family life in creative ways, allowing parents to be absent, and children to be raised by a variety of adults, in which adults themselves may be assumed not only as guardians but also as receiving care and company, in the spirit of the ideal that individuals should not be alone. Sharing care for a

child or raising the children of another parent is considered a way to strengthen relations among the adults in question. All these practices have facilitated female migration and in general women's possibilities for diversifying their sources of income.

Families rely not only on widely held ideals of intergenerational solidarity and obligation, but also on assumed gender and age hierarchies, where men may be largely absent and even disappear from the commitment to care. It is still the case that caring for the youngest, the elderly and the sick, and the daily management of a household can be distributed among the available women, as responsibilities can circulate among at least three generations of women, especially daughters, mothers and grandmothers. This availability is not only created by love, commitment, and obligation, but also due to the unequal distribution of opportunities for men and women, and for different generations of women, as well as the scarcity of alternative choices, shaped by unemployment, low education, and unstable incomes. Strong family commitments and daily performance of attentiveness offer alternatives for daily life, while coexisting with the inequalities of the labour market and the scarce possibilities of finding institutional care.

Sharing care requires intensive physical work and emotional management among women, both those remaining and those who migrate to other countries. In certain circumstances, women experience tensions between their ideals of family life, attending to a partner husband, or to the multiple obligations, and receiving the expected pleasures and relief that sharing care with other women involve. At times the ideal of the 'united family' comes to clash with the nuclear family form, but this is mostly at certain moments in life, like when Lucy got married, that are full of expectations. Afterwards, young mothers with unstable incomes and difficult relationships will return to the family, which is more likely to support them and their children. In this sense, processes of family 'nuclearization', as Moore calls it, should be considered as 'one strategy among several' and 'not open to all', because 'the poor, the single, the widowed and others cannot afford to abandon the 'web of kinship' which provides their safety-net' (1988:125).

While women in this chapter seem to carry out all the household and caring tasks, the next chapter will deal with the gendered aspects of the mobilisation of care through a focus on the role of men—spouses, partners, sons, brothers and fathers—in the reconfiguration of family and caring relations. What is the role of gendered inequalities

and gender ideologies in shaping the practices and ideals that sustain the shared commitments of care? How, precisely, do men care?

CHAPTER 5 | LIKE A WOMAN

Men, couples and domestic life

In the spring of 2009, I attended a birthday celebration party with a group of Ecuadorians in Barcelona. The party, complete with piñatas and food, was held in one of those modest shared migrant apartments early in the afternoon and with careful beer rationing to avoid disturbing the Catalan neighbours. Yolanda, a pregnant woman in her mid-thirties, shared with the other guests her experiences of how her partner had changed since they moved in together, and how incredible that transformation was for her. She told us:

‘My mother-in-law is surprised about how much my *marido* (male partner) has changed since we moved in together. He cooks, cleans, does the laundry, and even helps bathe his sisters’ children, believe it or not. He would never do those things before. He waited for his mother to do everything and he wanted me to be like her. He could sit in the living room without eating until someone else made food (*la comida*) for him. I said to him: “*Mijo*⁶⁷ (my son), don’t wait for others to do things for you, do it on your own”. Now he finally cooks. Nevertheless, I still see a problem, and that is, the beer and the volleyball on the weekends (*la cervecita y la pelotita del fin de semana*). He still goes out for beer and volleyball. I say to him, however, “If you continue in such a way, I’ll leave the child with you on the volleyball court”. He says that I wouldn’t dare to do that, but he needs to look after the child, too. Barcelona is not like Ecuador: ironed clothes (*la ropita planchada*) and hot food (*la*

⁶⁷ Some women relate to their partners with words like *mijo* (my son) to demonstrate affect, as they do with sons. Men also call their spouses or partners *mija* (my daughter). In daily talk, women can also refer to other women as *mija*. Men can also refer to women with terms like *mami*, *mamita* (mother), either to their own mothers, or to express that a woman is beautiful in their eyes, or just as a kind way to treat women in general.

comidita caliente) when the man comes home. Here we both work and have to do the household tasks (*las cositas de la casa*).

This chapter deals with a question: How do men engage in care? More specifically, in which ways is it possible for men and women to transcend gender roles and produce a space of ‘male domesticity’, and how do they synchronise their lives and manage their feelings to expand the possibilities for mobilising care under changing life conditions? More specifically, the chapter is concerned with gender transformations following couples’ attempts to remain together throughout the pressures of tight work schedules, geographical distance and years of separation. Ethnographically, this chapter is based on observations of couples living together in Barcelona and of others separated by migration. Since women are absent or only partially present at home, men have been left without any other choice than performing attentiveness at home, otherwise considered the domain of women (as seen in Chapters 3 and 4). Previous chapters have discussed how care circulates across social classes, and between friends and female relatives, binding them together through their permanent exchanges and feelings of being in debt. Moreover, we have seen how individuals transform themselves into family members and make themselves employable through dedication and attentiveness (Chapter 2), with their own pending obligations to home—their sacrifices (Chapter 3), all the while enmeshed in the requirements of migration regimes and recurrent economic crises. This chapter offers a reflection on the interplay between gender conventions and the mobilisation of care. By following how men and women negotiate and battle daily with the gender boundaries that have put men largely outside the realm of domesticity and caring relations, this chapter discusses a form of ‘male care’ and the emerging struggles around it.

Although an ideal conception of separate masculine and feminine spheres remains strong, daily life reveals broad variations of saying, thinking and doing, and ample possibilities as well as resistance to moving between the two realms. This chapter relies on ethnographic information about commonsensical ideas of what women and men do, should do, or should not do because they are men or women. It is observed that these ideas are unstable and locally constructed, and as such, subject to change. It is certainly not effortless for men and women to adapt to new practical circumstances when women spend

long hours outside the home, or when different ideals of family and social life come to compete with each other.

Inspired by discussions about masculinities and fluid ideas of gender (cf. Gutmann 2007 [1996], Boehm 2008), this chapter broadens the exploration of the mobility of care beyond the global care chains in order to consider couple life and male domesticity. As has been observed by different scholars, the widely popularised perspective of global chains focuses exclusively on women whilst men constitute ‘the missing link’ (Yeates 2005, Kilkey 2010, Locke 2017). This chapter will fill this vacuum by observing that while gender ideologies shape the lives of men and women in a variety of forms, these are revealed as unstable, showing that men and women can exchange care duties or roles. Men and women continue to act within a logic of ‘reciprocal rights and duties’ (Weismantel 1988), as seen in the definition of family, *la familia unida* (Chapter 3), but even this aspiration may eventually require adjustments. How do men and women make sense of their contradictions as they try to mobilise care when the mothers, wives, or other female helping hands are absent? This chapter shows how caring relations fluctuate according to the broader context of female work, gender transformation and transnational migration.

Life’s daily puzzle in Barcelona

Migrant men and women in Barcelona are under pressure—either because of their jobs or their lack of jobs. They are constantly subjected to work schedules, feel threatened by the possibility of losing their jobs, or experience the difficulties of finding new employment. Their precarious work life is a source of anxiety and uncertainty, even for those with work visas and well-paying jobs. For instance, medical doctors who had left Ecuador for a life in Barcelona confessed to feeling pressed to work both day and night shifts and complained of the little time they had to be with their families. My informants were often running around the city to work different part-time jobs during the day, but much of their time also went to searching for new opportunities and earnings. Moreover, women felt the added burden of household tasks. They attempted to keep their homes clean and felt obliged to do more of the cooking, cleaning and laundry than

men. But they also realised that if they wanted to have clean rooms and ironed clothes while working full time and extra hours, the man had to do household duties too (*las cositas de la casa*), as Yolanda commented in the introductory vignette.

Feminist scholars have highlighted the ‘second shift’ (Hochschild and Machung 1989). Even the ‘triple burden’ (Moore 1988:76) or the ‘triple shift’ (Freeman 2000:239) have been observed as women not only have to deal with formal employment and own domestic tasks, but also join the informal labour market in order to make ends meet. Similarly, many Ecuadorian women in Spain were actively involved in direct sales of cosmetics and toiletries on weekends or at the end of the day, as in the case of Mayra in Chapter 3, who after a day of working at the grocery shop or as a cleaner—described as ‘doing some hours’ (*haciendo unas horitas*)—kept calling Yanbal clients, searching for new ones, or organising meetings at her home where she provided information about new products and special prices to encourage other women to sell and make extra earnings. In contrast to Freeman’s Caribbean case (2000), the Ecuadorian women in my study seldom had a full-time job in Barcelona. Even when they did, their earnings were low, and they always needed a bit more for their multiple necessities. Daily life consisted of a variety of part-time income-oriented activities, apart from the intensive search for new jobs and contacts. There was a constant demand for information, not only about jobs and housing but also about schools, migration laws, reunification, loans or benefits to start a business, and access to health insurance. Migrants also frequently looked for opportunities for different forms of training (computer skills, languages, etc.) offered by the Employment Office at *El Ayuntamiento* (City Hall).

This enormously reduced women’s available time at home, being obliged to negotiate—even battle—with their partners regarding domestic tasks. Moreover, since they lived in shared apartments they also had to arrange schedules with other tenants for cooking, cleaning bathrooms and using the washing machine. Often, they were busy with cleaning and laundry during weekends. Regardless of the presence of men, these domestic issues were more likely to be discussed among women, and thus it was also the women who were more involved in domestic quarrels. Men were useful for moving heavy furniture, painting a wall, or repairing broken pipes or a damaged door. There were, of course, significant differences between couples with and without small children in Spain, as we will see later in this chapter.

Engendering men and migration

In the 1990s Pessar (1999) pointed out the need to engender studies and theories of migration. Since then, women have predominated in analyses of gender and migration, while issues related to men and masculinities have remained largely absent or tended exclusively to 'equate masculinity with power' (Pribilsky 2007:18). Like Pribilsky, in this chapter I follow Gutmann's observation (2007:147) that 'men as men', or their roles and identities, 'are developed and transformed in the home and not just in sites considered typical male reserves, like factories, cantinas, and political forums'. Of significance here is that my analysis does not depart from a fixed, pre-existent patriarchal Hispanic Latino *machista*⁶⁸ referential framework, since there are differences among classes, ethnic groups, generations, and urban and rural locations.⁶⁹ In contrast, I explore how men and women in practice try to adjust to the constraints and opportunities of transnational life. Female migration and left-behind spouses have offered an occasion to observe gender changes at home. In the Philippines, which Parreñas (2005) perceives as clearly demarcated by gender roles with disciplining fathers and nurturing mothers, she observes that left-behind husbands are more likely to get help from female relatives in domestic and caring tasks, and in doing so, the conventional gender order is maintained. When women leave, studies have highlighted that men experience a 'loss of self-respect and

⁶⁸ I refer here to features assumed to characterize 'the Latino patriarchy' such as excessive alcohol consumption, violence against women, men exclusively dedicated to watching football, and women being confined to the kitchen. Miles, writing about Ecuador, refers to patriarchy as 'the proper urban Hispanic model in which women are relegated to the domestic sphere and to the nurturing of family' (1997).

⁶⁹ *Machismo* is a topic that scholars working on gender and the Latin American context often see as necessary to explain. In the region, studies on men and masculinities developed in the middle of social economic and political transformations at the end of decades of military regimes (Valdés and Olavarria 1998, Gutmann 1993). Initiating studies of gender and men in America Latina, Gutmann (1993) analysed Mexican men and the impacts of the 1982 crisis on gender relations and constructions of masculinity. Scholars have emphasised the relevance of an intersectional perspective (Fuller 2001). The literature in general claims the need for going beyond 'homogeneous, monolithic and unchangeable' constructions of masculinity, to analyse it not only in relation to femininity but also to class, race, space and time (Montes 2013:473). In the Ecuadorian context, the Flacso collection on men and masculinities explores how gender and power relations are produced, offering insight to a variety of issues, especially fatherhood, race, sexuality and *machismo* (Andrade 2001).

dignity’ (Gamburd 2002), that ‘migration and marital dissolution are closely linked’ (Zlotnik 1995), and that, in general, threats to masculinity complicate marital relations (see Kabeer 2007). Montes (2013:474) criticises studies on increasing female migration for having primarily focused on men as providers, and on how male self-esteem has been jeopardized. In the case of Vietnamese transnational families, Hoang and Yeoh (2011) have observed a tendency to prefer that fathers take care of their children in the absence of wives. Even Asis et al. (2004) observe in Philippines that a few left-behind husbands have opted for full-time caring. This is very different from the pattern observed in Ecuador—and Latin America—where women, grandmothers, elder sisters, and even aunts and *comadres* (co-mothers) are always the preferred caregivers (see Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1999, Yarris 2017, Bastia 2009).

During fieldwork, my first observations left me with a great portion of confusing and contradictory information about ‘change and permanence’ in regard to gender (Gutmann (2007 [1996]:17), and it is within this fluctuation and ambiguity that I consider male domesticity in this chapter. Yolanda, in the introductory vignette, saw her relationship as promising change, while other couples introduced to me were more clearly patriarchal, showing directly ‘that the man rules’ (*el hombre manda*). Other women showed no evident desire to see their men changing and actively participating at home except when it came to lifting heavy furniture and bringing their earnings home. They explained that men doing ‘female things’ could be perceived as a woman’s failure to organise their home, or a man’s failure to exert enough authority at home. Other cases showed men timidly and cautiously describing themselves as doing ‘female work’ (*cosas de mujeres*) at home.

There is moreover a nostalgia for ‘how life used to be in Ecuador’, a nostalgia for *la familia unida*, yet there are also strong forces that demand change and adjustment to the new tight work schedules, to the absence of multiple female hands at home, and to a permanent reformulation of the meanings of caring relations and family life. Assuming the variety of responses provided by men and women, I argue that gender relations remain a terrain of contention, but in a very constricted sense if we observe men exclusively as providers (see other critics in Montes 2013, Locke 2017). By doing so, we reduce our ability to understand family dynamics, especially in the context of migration that may bring drastic transformation of routine aspects of care.

What is important in this chapter is to see how engendering migration can shed light on how people mobilise care, observing that the perspective of care and attentiveness as an exclusive female domain—a deeply rooted idea among Ecuadorian families (Chapter 3)—also coexists and adjusts with forms of ‘male domesticity’. Yarris (2017), with a focus on ‘transgenerational care’, observes how gender inequality supports male irresponsibility with their children, and how this has left grandmothers without any choice other than caring for new generations of children in Nicaraguan transnational families. In my exploration of the Ecuadorian case, I see the possibility of discussing ‘male care’ in the context of the feminisation of migration.

The blurry terrain of male domesticity

It was often difficult to move beyond standard ideologies of gender relations when I initially interviewed people, as in the case of Pepe and Gloria, who were both in their middle to late fifties when I met them in 2007. They presented themselves to me in a clear gendered hierarchy. When I conducted the first interview with them, Pepe’s strong voice overwhelmed all other noise in the bar close to Plaza Cataluña, where we had met over coffee and croissants. He became anxious when I offered to pay. ‘Why should a woman pay?’ he asked, shaking his head and his hand. He was extremely talkative and accustomed to public speaking, skills that had made him a leader in the local evangelical Christian church in Ecuador, which he continued to cultivate in Barcelona. After a long monologue, I reminded him that I wanted to hear about Gloria’s experiences as well. I wondered why Pepe was with us because I had only invited Gloria. Was Gloria shy to meet me? Did Pepe have difficulties letting her go alone to meet an unknown woman on a Saturday? Whatever the reason, they seemed confident in each other’s company. Pepe talked a lot and seemed to enjoy this role, while Gloria showed no sign of being especially uncomfortable with this situation. Their interaction left me full of questions about whether gender relations were changing as much as Yolanda had claimed in the beginning of this chapter. Was Yolanda’s description of men adjusting to household participation exceptional cases in the female experiences of migration? As I understood later, Pepe and Gloria were providing their own public representation of ‘a

united organised family’ to a ‘curious journalist’—as they insisted on calling me.

As we became friends over the following months I sometimes observed Pepe stirring the soup for dinner. After many of these scenes, and my attempts to help, they described in detail how they organized a day with the cooking, laundry and cleaning. Because both were working, nobody had much time at home. ‘We both do domestic tasks’ (*los dos hacemos las cosas de la casa*), Pepe said, which Gloria confirmed a bit sceptically. ‘Before Gloria goes to work, she starts the laundry. When I come back I take out the laundry, and hang it up to dry’, explained Pepe. I did not know if Pepe had prepared the whole dinner when I arrived home with Gloria, but she recurrently told him to start meals that required long cooking, like dried beans (*fréjoles secos*) or cow foot soup (*caldo de patas*). When Gloria came from work, she seasoned the food. Mostly, Pepe was active preparing snacks or sandwiches for their weekly Bible studies at home. In general, Pepe fulfilled a typical male role of helping his wife, but not taking command in the most important meals like lunch and dinner.

As I became closer to Gloria and Pepe, I frequently visited them in their small, newly painted apartment in downtown Barcelona, where they had moved from their shared place in another barrio ‘to get something a little better’, and in order to fulfil some requirements for family reunification. They proudly described how they had renovated the place ‘with their own hands’, in the hope of bringing over their daughter Ruth in the near future. The place had been a mess, dirty and muddy, but Pepe had organised and conducted all the necessary work for the renovation, cleaning and painting, and installing a comfortable system of heaters for the winter. When Gloria was there, she assisted him with all these activities, sweeping and handing out the tools he needed, carrying water, holding pieces of wood, and ‘especially cooking good food to compensate for the heavy work’. In this account, Gloria was helping Pepe since the issues of building and renovation are associated with men. What was mentioned most often was that Gloria prepared the meals. Building and renovation was a male issue (*cosa de hombres*). Moreover, Pepe was frequently installing or repairing something in the house: a new bookshelf, a new ventilator when it was warm, or putting in new light bulbs that helped to save energy. This ‘male domesticity’ is often not included in what is called household chores—cooking, cleaning and childcare—activities that in the social sciences are associated with women’ (Gutmann 2007 [1996]:149). So, engendering the mobility of care

reveals a need to expand the range of activities included in notions of daily attentiveness. Moreover, this gendered division of activities shows that couples keep themselves in a framework of family life in which men and women fulfil different roles and belong to differentiated realms. While Gloria prepared the daily meals, Pepe helped her and repaired items required at home.

I observed that gender issues were broadly varied and difficult to grasp in the first impression. As Gutmann states, ‘the gender character of social life is never transparent’ (2007 [1996]:12). The dynamic of gender change and continuity offered all kinds of variation rather than a stable distribution of responsibilities. My informants constantly shifted back and forth between accepting a new situation, desiring ‘a better life’ and their generalised ideas about the nature of men and women and what they should or not should do. They imagined a life in which they were equal on their own terms; that is, in terms of exchange. They envisaged a kind of generalised reciprocity, where one does for the other what is assumed that the other cannot (or should not) do in a certain situation or moment. The other should reciprocate these efforts at a later moment, and most probably with a different kind of offering. For example, men were expected to provide more cash and women more engagement with household and caring tasks.

For couples living at a distance, practical experiences were different. They had to create new ways to maintain interest in each other. In these circumstances, infidelity—imagined or actual—was always a threatening factor, which ‘destroyed families’ in migration, a common topic of conversation discussed in the next section. How does this influence male care? When a couple broke up, for example, it was not expected for the man to provide for his children (though law obliges men to make monthly payments). Although families were perceived as open entities, women often emphasised the importance of keeping the biological father of their children on their side. In the Andes, women frequently remarked to me: ‘Nobody is better than the biological father’ (*No hay nadie como el taita del guagua*). This perception prioritizes the need of the couple to stay together, and specifically, the importance of the presence of the biological father of one woman’s children. So, much female effort went to keeping families intact. Infidelity put a man’s dedication at risk because it took his attention and material resources away from his spouse and offspring, and threatened family unity. Moreover, unfaithfulness was conflictual because it was assumed to be part of the man’s identity. In the next section, I will focus more specifically on the issue of

infidelity and separation and how women managed it in their different circumstances.

Managing infidelity at a distance

Leinaweaver has identified a 'high degree of gender balance' in Peruvian migration and 'that reunifications may first facilitate spousal rather than parent-child relations' (2010:71). Statistically, the same appears true of Ecuadorian migration: after the rise in female migration in the late 1990s, male migration rapidly came to reach similar percentages (Gratton 2007:588). It is not clear, however, that this was necessarily about spousal reunification. Women may well have reunified with a son or another male relative, or 'someone from the extended family', as Acosta et al. (2006:86) suggested for the Ecuadorian case. Nevertheless, in my research large numbers of Ecuadorian men and women described how they left children in Ecuador, and women readily discussed their attempts to bring their spouses to Spain. Legal requirements, low salaries, overcrowded shared homes, and the long hours of work out of home weighed heavily in parents' decisions about bringing children to Spain. Another reason that men and women gave for their decision to leave children was that Ecuador was perceived as a better environment to grow up in than Spain. For instance, Ecuadorians would comment: 'In Spain, children did not respect their parents nor their teachers in schools' or that 'the girls were too liberated in Spain' or 'the family is not so united as it is in Ecuador'.

Besides rumours and all the risks of separation and divorce in migration, economic aspects were a prime reason to reunite. Carlos (a left-behind spouse in Las Palmas whom we will meet later in this chapter) stated that 'a couple works better and earns more together', and most other migrants would agree. That is, they profit by the convenience of having a double income to sustain the family. Because of this fact, there were cases of women who had tried to bring their husbands to Spain even when their marital relations in Ecuador had been strongly marked by domestic violence. Betty, another woman in the Yanbal network, described the very complicated and violent marital relationship from which she had escaped by coming to Spain. However, she admitted, 'Oh, I wanted him to come here. We tried, but

we couldn't do it'. A female leader in a local association of Ecuadorian migrants in Barcelona provided the explanation that if the man was unemployed in Ecuador, the woman hoped that he could get a job in Spain to 'help' her sustain the children. In fact, during my fieldwork I hardly found a woman who had not tried to reunite with her spouse regardless the quality of their marital relationship before migration.

Beyond hopes for economic betterment and despite a past full of conflicts and even violence, predominant sexual expectations and assumptions about men also influenced couples' decisions concerning reunification, as well as how the separation was managed when they lived at a distance. Living at a distance became more complicated by the widely spread idea that 'a man needs sex, it is in his nature'. In practical terms, it was a problem for a couple to live apart if both men and women understood men's sexuality as uncontrollable, because leaving a man alone would surely damage the marriage. If the wife was not present, both men and women commented, 'the man needs someone else because he is a man, what can he do there all alone?' There was a perceived permanent risk of infidelity when spouses lived at a distance. In general, there was a silent agreement in which women did not expect husbands to stay faithful at a distance 'because men are men'. And women could claim that 'there were always available women out there for men left alone'. With these resigned convictions in mind male unfaithfulness was something women had to manage in different ways, while still keeping their affective ties and marriages in a balance across distance.

For example, after 10 years of separation, Celia, 50 years old, planned to return to her husband Juan in her hometown La Victoria in Ecuador. Being aware of her husband's love affairs, she was not sure if the marital relationship would work out. Due to that perhaps, it was important for her to describe to me that during her last visit and phone calls she had tried to lessen his self-perception of being attractive to other women. She described that she told him: 'Do you think that women want you because you are handsome (*bonito*)? What they want is your money (*tu plata*). They think you have it. But it is only me, the mother of your children, who stands by your side (*a tu lado*) despite all suffering (*a pesar de todos los sufrimientos*), not for what you have, but because you are the father of my children'. Celia told me that her husband had replied, 'Look, if I didn't love you, I could have found another woman long ago'. Celia played with the idea of what

she would like to reply to him and told me: ‘And what does he think, Gladis? Here there are lots of suitors, aren’t there?’

While emphasising Celia’s ‘sacrifice’, these dialogues preserved the relationship. In this way, Celia also prevented the husband from getting involved in more serious and long-lasting affairs with other women, which could have destroyed their marriage. Celia hoped these affairs were only temporary but felt anxious about the risks of an unpleasant surprise. What helped her to keep an eye on him was the presence of the daughter and members of the extended family living in the same neighbourhood as the husband. With their ups and downs, Celia and Juan had managed to keep the interest in one another awake during the past decade. They had been taking care of their fragile relation together, under the uncertainties of what would happen when she eventually returned home.

Celia’s story of staying together with her husband also reveals how she played with basic understanding of the ‘good and bad woman’ to convince her spouse to wait and to stay faithful: the contrast between the money-driven, self-interested women versus herself, the sacrificing mother and faithful spouse, who was moved by ‘pure love’, free from material interests. In the intermingling of money and intimacy that frames couples’ relationships, Celia drew her own limits, identifying herself as materially disinterested and authentic in order to preserve her marriage. Celia’s narrative represents a proposal for togetherness under difficult marital circumstances, dealing with a great geographical distance for a long period of time, while a dream of a ‘better life’ becomes difficult to achieve.

Money, witches and infidelity

In more complicated cases when separation seemed inevitable, one way for women to maintain their dignity and to forgive their husbands’ infidelity was by referring to witchcraft (*brujería* or *daño*). In the middle of the 2008 global crisis, when Jessica and her husband had sold their apartment in order to return to Ecuador, he had remained in Barcelona with a lot of money while she had moved back to Guayaquil with their three children. Still feeling pain and anger, she described how in Spain her husband had been going out with a woman from the Dominican Republic. ‘Those dirty ones, he seemed

bewitched' (*estaba como brujeado*), Jessica expressed. A betrayed woman trying to find an explanation for male infidelity, and wanting to keep her man, often blamed the other woman. When these experiences did not clearly threaten to destroy the family, women could see them as incidents, even pretending they did not know anything. More serious infidelities became greater worries for women, especially if the family savings were at risk. For Jessica it was frightening, since she saw the risk of losing the profit from the apartment, the money they had planned to use in the construction of their house in Ecuador upon return. Fortunately, Jessica overcame this problem. Like other women, Celia and Jessica commented that they had decided to continue together with their spouses 'for the sake of the children'. They stressed repeatedly their feelings of obligation and 'sacrifice' (*lo hago por mis hijos*). With these words, they expressed the renunciation of their own desires of punishing or leaving their husbands, remarking that a women's final decision was made to preserve the family unity. The interpretation of witchcraft as well as the framework of sacrifice provided a more resilient character to family morality, leaving the door open for an accused but regretful man. By effectively declaring the man innocent, the marriage can be saved, and the family can be 'united and harmonious' again. The attempts to incorporate the man into the dynamic of care could continue, but also the possibilities of having daily quarrels with spouses were still there. Moreover, female efforts to keep their men on their side despite all obstacles reflected women's consciousness of economical needs, but also their awareness of the importance of staying together in 'well-formed families', often the nuclear family.

According to my observations during fieldwork, couples normally tended to continue their relationships after migrating in the same mode as before migration. If the relation had been problematic and the woman had escaped it by going to Spain, the couple would probably divorce or separate. Other scholars have observed cases in which migration and absence helped to revive feelings and commitment (Meñaca, personal communication, see also Pribilsky 2004).⁷⁰ For the stories related here, however, it remains an open question what will happen to Celia when she returns to Juan, or what will happen to Emperatriz, whose ex-husband is still longing for her and who, according to her, cannot understand that the marriage has long been over. Jessica said she was happy living in Guayaquil with her three

⁷⁰ See also Meñaca PhD Thesis, unpublished.

children and her husband, who had returned to her without losing the money. However, she was not sure how she would manage his infidelities in the future. For the time being, they worked daily to finish their big and beautiful house and to start different businesses (*negocios propios*) that could provide them with enough income, without ‘killing’ themselves working as they did in Spain. When I last met her, Jessica had started a small cybercafé at home and found an *empleada* to help with cooking. Her husband had bought building machines to lease for construction projects. Together they had also bought a farm (*una finca*) outside of Las Palmas where they grew cacao for export. ‘And how is life at home? What does he do at home?’ I asked. She replied: ‘Yeaah he helps me, mostly . . . he likes to clean the floor, he wakes up in the morning and sweeps. He is good at that. A lot of time, however, he spends at the farm, or searching for clients to rent the machines. But he also always has eyes for other women, *hasta por una escoba con falda se le van los ojos, ñaña!*’ (He becomes easily attracted by all kinds of women without exception, sister!) [laughs].

Many of my research respondents said they knew several stories of male and female infidelity, when the partners were left alone during migration. Accounts of male infidelity, however, may not always represent concrete facts in daily life. While men and women said they knew ‘someone else who did it’, men (in absence of their wives) were eager to describe ‘their own stories’ in detail. When I tried to interview some men at the beginning of my fieldwork in Barcelona, many of them insistently talked about their earlier sexual encounters with different women. Whatever the topics I initiated in which separation of couples was raised, they brought up the topic of male sexual activity and justified ‘encountering other women’, saying ‘what could I do? I’m a man’ or ‘my wife was not with me’. As Pribilsky (2007:253) and Gutmann (2007 [1996]:130) have found, men talked more about sexual activity than they actually engaged in, and perhaps this was also true of my respondents. I understand that they were expressing their masculinity. In contrast, women did not admit personally to have had such experiences, perhaps because infidelity was not morally appreciated as a positive female merit. In any case, women were left with most of the hard ‘emotional management’ (Hochschild 2003 [1983]) in cases of infidelity.

As seen in the last chapter, women did not pay much attention to this aspect of their lives because new male partners were thought to threaten women’s abilities to support their left-behind families.

Having ‘suitors’ (*los pretendientes*), as Celia and Emperatriz could sometimes recall, was the closest thing to being unfaithful or starting a new relationship; this was something that, according to women themselves, never happened if they were married and still planned to return to their husbands. In any case, infidelity, its management, and the different meanings assigned to it, shaped the reconfiguration of care in migration. The fear of infidelity was not enough to initiate reunion, but it did reinforce the importance of men and women living together, along with the idea that ‘children’s reunification can be discussed later’ (Leinaweaver 2010). The reunion with their male partners meant not only betterment of family income, but it also created the hope of saving the marriage and constructed opportunities to keep alive a ‘united family’ with caring partners.

With such difficulties, women and men managed to live in separation, while a persistent idea of togetherness based on expectations of returning or reuniting, a hope for ‘a future together’, helped them keep their marriages alive. As with the other shared narratives, such as the promise of a house or the sacrificing mother, ideals of togetherness are shaped through the sustainment of marriages. In the next section, I explore ambiguous feelings and practical material issues of being together for Celia and Juan. Since saving money was prioritized, frequent visits were not possible. We will see that spouses’ relationships are never exempt from the negotiations and exchanges of love and material things, though individuals safeguarded their moral boundaries regarding both aspects. Equally important is that money does not produce estrangement from beloved ones. Instead, money (together with shared narratives) contributes to keeping closeness and intimacy alive despite distance and absence.

‘Separated but together’

Couples living separately but perceiving themselves as still together confronted realities and problems that differed from those who cohabited with their partners, and from others who were aware of an inevitable separation. They had other tensions related to ‘emotion work’ at a distance: how feelings should be shown, what to say and not say, how to manage marital relations on the phone or what gifts they could send to keep a place in the partner’s heart. Celia admitted

to feeling relief at not having Juan around and ‘nobody who bothers me’ (*nadie que me joda*), when she recalled being abused at home in Ecuador. The permanent pains in her back (*dolor de riñones*) were a constant reminder of the many kicks (*patadas*) she had received from her husband years before. Yet, she missed him and wanted to do things like fold his laundry and prepare his meals when she visited after some years. In some sense, carrying out household tasks was a way of showing dedication and making up for the time they had spent apart, ‘the lost time’ (*el tiempo perdido*), she said. Her last visit to Ecuador spoke a lot about her mix of love and obligation as a wife: ‘My poor Juan, his trousers and socks, everything was a mess in the drawers. I took one after another and put them in place before I returned to Barcelona’.

Moreover, she described how her second departure to Spain had been painful, different from the first. She said: ‘The first time you leave is an amazing adventure. There was so much expectation that I could earn a lot of money quickly. You don’t know how life is here [Spain] the first time. But this was my second time, and I really didn’t feel good about leaving’. Worrying and anxious about returning to Barcelona, remaining in Ecuador was appealing. I understood moreover that her assumption was that matters would then return to a familiar gendered order when I asked her what type of work she would do upon eventually returning to Ecuador for good. Celia said: ‘Nothing, I won’t work. My husband (*mi marido*) has to sustain me. I have already sacrificed a lot by coming here [Barcelona], but perhaps I will sell some jewellery like gold, silver, something like that’.

The role of the attentive wife in the household was imagined as a slot to go back to, but this was marked with ambiguous feelings, something women wished for as an ideal situation, though they knew that life never had been in that way. At the same time, Celia perceived the lack of quarrels and tasks of attending daily to a husband in Barcelona like a valued freedom from him, though she admitted she missed his company. Life in Barcelona was lonely, and neither work nor money was abundant, as she had thought before migration: ‘*No era lo que creíamos*’ (It wasn’t what we thought), she said. She went through long periods of unemployment (*en el paro*) in which she sustained herself with her unemployment benefits, cleaning or offering inexpensive manicures and pedicures. The desire of a wife to be sustained by her husband often becomes a source of longing due to a precarious life in Barcelona, but it should not be reduced to a plea for a patriarchal family form. Celia had had her own beauty parlour

and identified herself as *maestra de belleza* (hairdresser expert) prior to migration. She had made a career of training a new generation of hairdressers in her town. She was an independent woman, but when she spoke about returning to Ecuador, she told me that her husband ‘had to support me again’. The image of a man supporting his wife remains strong, even though women are independent and have been living far away for many years.

Celia’s husband Juan did not raise the issue of infidelity but explained that ‘life was hard’ with Celia living in Spain. He explicitly said Celia left due to poverty, *la pobreza*, perhaps rationalising that this was the only way in which it could be comprehensible that a woman would leave her husband to go abroad to work. He enjoyed full-time employment at the local hospital and had friends and relatives to play volleyball with in the afternoons. He and Jazmin, their daughter, lived close to his elderly mother and ate there nearly every day. The day I visited them, they had brought a complete meal from the grandmother to share with me. Jazmin commented: ‘How lucky we are to have my grandmother cooking; she lives so close and cooks deliciously!’ During this afternoon together, Juan’s marital relationship with Celia never became a central topic. Rather, he recurrently turned the conversation to their career plans for Jazmin. It was important for her to study, he said, showing his pride but also his worries about a young daughter trying to become a tour guide and travelling ‘alone’ to the different tourism attractions of coastal Ecuador.⁷¹

Couples such as Juan and Celia who do remain committed to one another often continue to perceive themselves as together in spite of living apart for many years, and despite the many conflicts they go through. This confirms a frequent point in our conversations about the meaning of the family, that ‘no matter if you quarrel and quarrel, the thing is to stay together’. Another couple remained linked through sporadic telephone calls, sometimes not even directly but mediated by their children and grandchildren. Other couples living together in Spain ended in divorce. In the following section, I will use the

⁷¹ The generalised idea that women are in danger travelling alone and that this may constitute a reason to gossip about their reputation is a form of social control. It should be acknowledged, however, that there has been increasing violence against women in the country. It is worth noting, for instance, that femicide was incorporated in the Ecuadorian legislation in 2014 with the growing number of women killed across the country. See, for example, Pontón Cevallos 2009, Flasco, <http://repositorio.flacsoandes.edu.ec/bitstream/10469/286/1/BFLACSO-CS31-04-Pontón.pdf> Accessed February 28, 2018.

example of Mayra, who was introduced in Chapter 3, and her active social life, to describe how this happens. Her example shows the need for revising normative notions of masculinity that situate men in a fixed role of provider.

Beyond the male provider

Having a partner in Spain was a source of support as well as conflict, particularly with the presence of small children at home. For men and women with intense work lives, who were trying to keep in place an idealised order where the man was in charge, while the wife, female relatives or an *empleada* did the housework and childcare, the balance between work and home could spiral out of control and eventually lead to the break-up of the relationship.

As migrant men living alone might come to understand the significant amount of household tasks performed by absent wives (see Pribilsky 2004), women also came to recognise the significance of the help provided by other women at home, who were often overlooked and taken for granted. The more difficult it was for a man to adapt to life in Barcelona, the more challenges the couple faced; while the woman progressively became more socially and economically independent.

Determined to make a living, Mayra, like other migrant women, quickly developed skills to search for work opportunities and a social network of their own. She learned to manage city life, paying bills, going to banks, shopping, or negotiating with authorities and institutions. It was through this process that women developed an extended network of friends and acquaintances, that did not always fit the ideal of an at-home-wife or the expectations held by their husbands—and, for that matter, by the women themselves. In fact, as seen in Chapter 3, a constant problem for husbands, women said, was that women were too sociable (*demasiado amigueras*). Their men felt uncomfortable with that but recognised that networking was necessary during migration.

Although Mayra had been working in an office when she met her husband and they both continued to work, after they reunited in Barcelona they had great difficulties in adapting to their tight work schedules and also caring for their little son. As mentioned earlier,

Mayra was convinced that she had to attend to her husband. At dinnertime, her husband sat at the head of the table and was served first. She hastened to please him. If it happened that he needed more *aji* (chilli), he just shouted ‘ajiiiiii!’ and she ran into the kitchen to get it for him. Often when I was invited to eat at her home, she worried about what my husband was eating ‘alone’, she emphasised, and laughed when I said he managed on his own. She said this was not the case for her and illustrated their exchange. She attended to her husband and he paid the bills. She commented: ‘That’s it! I never miss anything at home, I don’t worry about the bills; beyond that, I’ve been always madly in love with him. . . .’ Some poor elderly women in Guayaquil expressed similar ideas of what a good husband should be, in sum, a good provider. ‘He brings all the stuff home, the refrigerator is kept full, if he had love affairs it should be totally out of our home’. A loving partner was imagined as someone who provided well for the family, the rest being secondary. Infidelity might be expected and forgiven if it did not threaten the ‘united family’.

Mayra, however, said she missed having a loving partner, a father who played with his child. ‘My son has never played with his dad’, she routinely commented whenever we had the opportunity to see a man playing with a little child in a park. I also remember the first day I met Mayra on a street in Via Bella. She introduced herself to me among laughs and jokes: ‘I have a little son at home! *Mi marido es el canguro ahorita!*’ (My husband is the babysitter now). These frequent comments related to how she wanted her husband to be manifested her longing for another kind of family dynamic. Younger women and men in this study struggled with transformations of love and care when other ways of being fathers and couples arose. Mayra wished for a kind of ‘companionate marriage’ (Hirsch 2007), which meant that she would find company and friendship in her husband, a playful father for her child, and someone who would still provide economically. My younger informants often fluctuated between different ideals of family life, one based on commitment as *la familia unida*, and the other on romantic love and pleasure. One model did not exclude the other and they were both kept alive in different circumstances depending on what kind of relationship was in question. Heterosexual couple relations were more idealised than other kind of relationships, like that of siblings. In fact, the ideal of the romantic loving partner has gained terrain as men’s and women’s time at home drastically diminishes. In a busy distressing life with a scarcity of ‘helping hands’, the growing difficulties for men and women in coming to terms with a kind of

family that balances love and obligation is no surprise. As Hirsch (2007:103) observes, commenting on Giddens' idea of the 'pure relationship', 'the rise of love has coincided with the rise in divorce'.⁷²

I witnessed Mayra's distressing life when I was just getting to know her family. Apparently, attending to her husband did not bother her so much, but she was clearly disturbed when she suspected he was unfaithful and by his desire to return to his home country rather than trying to improve their life together. As time went on and she felt increasingly disappointed, she also admitted that actually he did not contribute so much economically for their child, not because he did not have money but because he had other interests in his country. She was intimating to the possibility of another woman and 'the other son he has in Colombia', something she had not described earlier. She frequently had difficulty finding someone to watch her son and she weighed the idea of sending him to Ecuador temporarily but when she realised how much money would be needed for remittances, she said: 'No, it's better for him to stay with me, and . . . how I could manage to live without my boy?' Moreover, her husband would not allow their son to be sent to another country. He would possibly consider sending the child to his mother in Colombia, but the idea scared Mayra.

My observations of the Ecuadorian women and their romantic relations revealed that they did not exactly struggle with ideals of equal rights and duties for men and women, but rather with how men could still work hard and provide, while adding a touch of love and companionship. Women described their hopes that their partners would bring their entire earnings home instead of spending some of it on beer with friends at the volleyball court, *la pelotita y la cervecita*, as Yolanda put it in the introductory story. However, these were occasions for men to celebrate friendship and freedom from an otherwise heavy working life or depressing periods of unemployment. Mayra's husband had two or three jobs. When he spent time at home, he was tired and confined to their bedroom with no energy to play with their son. Mayra also had many jobs but once at home she continued to cook and clean and attend to him and the child. I never could talk to Mayra's husband directly, though I was often at their home. It seemed like he had given up on having a family life with Mayra, or perhaps he was satisfied with having a beautiful attentive wife waiting for him at home. Mayra said she wanted to do more to cultivate family harmony but did not know how could she do this with

⁷² On love, intimacy and global change, see Padilla et al. 2007.

so many activities to carry out during the day. Constantly worried that things would not work out, Mayra saved money to build a house in Ecuador that would be an investment or home for her, as mentioned in Chapter 3. As she worked more hours, she had less time for her son and for being an attentive committed wife, which augmented the marital disagreements, while she simultaneously dreamed of a loving playful man. Her husband, on his part, was dreaming of returning to his parents in his home country, Mayra told me. She criticised and resented him: ‘He is too attached to his mother (*tiene mamitis*). He calls her in Colombia every day’. Mayra’s and her husband’s goals did not often coincide. Over the course of two years, the plan for a divorce became more and more concrete.

So far, the stories in this chapter show that gender barriers remain strong. Harmony is clearly difficult to construct when individuals had high expectations, or several jobs and little time for family, as well as when they were unemployed and depressed, or overwhelmed by debts or by unfulfilled dreams. During the time of my fieldwork, women had found jobs in care and domestic service while men were losing their niche in the construction industry. Agriculture only offered seasonal income opportunities (a niche increasingly shared with women). In any case, women needed men who could ‘help’ since there were no available women to assist them with household tasks ‘like in Ecuador’. A caring male partner was someone who adapted, learned and helped out, a man with strong desires to be part of the united family and who did not find another woman with whom to live apart.

Male care: learning, helping, and changing

In Ecuador, when I asked women what their men did at home, if they were active in the household (*con los quehaceres de la casa*), and with their children, they often replied, ‘Yeah, he helps me’, a vague expression that referred to men’s sporadic contributions. In Barcelona, women sometimes said, ‘He has changed!’ What these colloquial expressions illustrate are the basic perception of separated feminine and masculine realms, and also an open door allowing change and ambiguity.

Pribilsky (2007:249-250) and Gutmann (2007 [1996]:156-157) highlight what seems to be a common perception about male domesticity, something that was evident among my research respondents in both Barcelona and Ecuador. That is, that men do housework only if there is no alternative, ‘by necessity’ (*por necesidad*) (Gutmann 2007 [1996]:156). My research respondents in Barcelona and Ecuador expressed this as, ‘there is no choice’ (*no queda otra*), meaning that they were obliged to do the ‘female work’ when there was no one else to do that. Pribilsky agrees with other scholars of Andean region when he states that: ‘Men hold babies, watch children, and prepare meals, yet these tasks for them are often fleeting . . . men help wives only if they do not have another choice, such as in the period after wives have given birth’ (Pribilsky 2007:249). Similarly, many of the men I met in Barcelona as well as in Ecuador claimed that they could go beyond gender expectations doing ‘female tasks’, but not by preference.

For example, Robert was working and living in Barcelona while his children and wife remained in Ecuador. A professional in business management, Robert worked in a shop in Via Bella selling electronic appliances (*electrodomésticos*) that were delivered to Ecuador. During the previous Ecuadorian crisis he had lost his job as manager in a company on the south coast and decided to migrate. He said about his domestic tasks in Barcelona: ‘Yeah, what can I do? It is very expensive to eat in restaurants every day. I have learned (*he aprendido*) to cook, even if it is only rice with a fried egg, it’s enough. It isn’t difficult. I even iron my own clothes. I made double lines when I ironed the trousers in the beginning but that was ok. It’s difficult, but we men, we learn those things when we are alone. What could I do? My wife and my children are in Ecuador. They won’t move here. I don’t think it’s good for children to live here. I’m here just to make some money, but later I will return’. Robert added: ‘You know, in Ecuador everything was ready when I came home from my job. I worked at my office and my wife was at home. Things were so different’.

Robert evoked nostalgia of ‘an Ecuadorian way of living’, and missed his wife and children, but still felt that it was a good decision to migrate. He was proud of being able to support his family. Moreover, by migrating alone, Robert recognised that he was ‘learning female tasks’ (*las cosas de la casa, los quehaceres*). He also accepted that he had no other choice than to make the sacrifice, giving

up the comfort of being at home, and that living apart was not an easy endeavour.

Men who lived with their wives, but sporadically performed domestic caring tasks at home, would be referred to by women in Ecuador as *ayudando* (assisting or helping). Men's help (*ayuda*) may also be part of the performance of attentiveness that Ecuadorian women talk about, but for men this was not a primary issue. Men's performance of attentiveness was not defined as a fundamental part of male identity but as obligatory because of the situation. In fact, as an ideal, attentiveness goes against masculinity. To emphasize that the domestic sphere and the activities that it involved was not the world of men, male participation was framed in terms of help, or helping out. *Ayuda* (help) is a term that defines the limited commitment of men, but opens a door for male flexibility as men 'are allowed' to move, carefully and discretely, toward the female sphere. This is an important feature for understanding the fluidity of gendered couple relations.⁷³

Women shifted between resignation, doubt and enthusiasm: '*Sí . . . sí, me ayuda*' (Yeah . . . he helps me), or '*Sí, me ayuda a ver los bebes*' (He helps me to watch the babies), or '*Sí, sí limpia*' (Yeah, he cleans). *Ayuda* means that the activities that a man does are only supplementary to the female tasks. Moreover, *ayuda* highlights a positive character of a man, a man who collaborates, who is kind and cares about his family, while still doing what is socially respectable. In the same sense, women's income could be considered as *ayuda*, an addition to the household income, which is generally considered a male issue (cf. Meñaca unpublished, 175). The female's contribution was only secondary to that of the male. This separation of female and male realms is commonly present, but when women become migrants and then the main providers, the women's income is no longer described as 'help', but in more equal terms as 'two in one'. As Boehm's (2008) informants in Mexico expressed of themselves as 'being man and woman', many of my female research respondents recognised themselves as being 'father and mother for their children'

⁷³ Identifying male contributions as help is something that scholars have frequently observed, for instance, in Mexico (Gutmann (2007 [1996]:157) and Vietnam (Hoang and Yeoh 2011). *Ayuda* in general refers to what an individual does in somebody else's domain. In this sense, children's contributions to the household may also be called *ayuda* (see Magazine and Ramirez 2007).

(*soy padre y madre para mis hijos*), when having acquired responsibilities beyond the gender convention.

What I want to emphasise with this persistent idea of divided male and female realms is how they coexist with possibilities for transgression between them. These gender accounts of learning and helping show a multifaceted and complicated process of adjustment in different situations. In the following section I introduce Carlos, a left-behind spouse and father in a very poor family. He remained in Ecuador in his town Las Palmas with no other choice than to accept the obligation to become just ‘like a woman’ (*como una mujer*) during his wife’s migration.

Like a woman

The most extreme examples of mobile gender boundaries that I came across during fieldwork was through stories of men who had stayed behind to take care of small children and the household. Such men faced great challenges related to childcare and domestic tasks in the absence of their migrant wives, sometimes even without paid help. Such a case is exemplified by Carlos who had stayed at home with his three daughters who were 5, 7 and 9 years old, receiving remittances from his wife Alba in Barcelona, at times supplementing them via informal sales of food on the streets and to buses on the road—his way of making a living.

‘People call me Mariaca’ (*Me dicen Mariaca*), Carlos said in his introduction to me, laughing and alluding to a popular TV cooking program, since his daily occupation involved cooking. Men in that situation would often need a female helping hand, but Carlos did not have a choice. The women in his and his wife’s families had already migrated to Italy or Spain, and Carlos stayed at home with all the responsibilities. Alba, his wife, had been taking care of her sisters’ left-behind children before those children were reunited with their mothers, allowing Alba herself to migrate. In March 2008 when I met Carlos, Alba had been living in Barcelona for five months. Carlos and Alba’s family were among the poorest in their town. She could leave for Spain only with the help of her two sisters already living there. Alba had already started to send home 400 US dollars per month, Carlos said. She had found a job very quickly, through her sisters. In

fact, said Carlos, she had already gotten a job in Spain before leaving Ecuador. ‘Her boss talked to me on the phone and I agreed with him, so everything was organized. Her sisters arranged all that, you know?’ With these words, Carlos clarified that his wife’s migration was done with his agreement, in dialogue with him. With their current economic improvement and his trust in both Alba and in the environment where she worked, Carlos seemed enthusiastic and determined to focus on caring daily for the daughters—in any case, he had no other choice. However, he really hoped to migrate to join Alba in the near future since the economic situation in Ecuador was worsening. ‘The prices of basic products are increasing, but people don’t want to pay more for a dish. Selling food is not a good business’, he said, referring to his plan to stop his sales. The children, he said, ‘can stay with someone else who takes care of them. If a woman works together with her man in Spain, this is a much better way to save money’. The idea that a couple worked better together than an individual alone became reinforced when the wives were doing well in Spain, while those left-behind in Ecuador were facing lower salaries, rising levels of unemployment, and unsatisfied needs.

I asked Carlos what life was like for a man at home with small children. He said it was hard to keep up. ‘I am like a woman’ (*Soy como una mujer!*). He had to prepare the meals and send the daughters to school. ‘The only thing I don’t do is the laundry’. He paid a laundry woman, (*lavandera*). I asked why. He said because he was a man. Showing his hand to me, he added that he lacked a finger. Simultaneously he joked for all the neighbours who had surrounded us at that moment, curious to hear our conversation. At this point, Carlos seemed delighted about being the focus of attention. There was another thing he did not do, and that was bathing the girls: ‘I cannot do that, it is the oldest one who bathes the others. I asked, ‘Why don’t you do that?’ Carlos replied, ‘It was my wife’s decision that things should be in this way, because they are girls’.

Laundry and bathing girls were two well-defined tasks that belonged to the female world of attentiveness, in which men were prevented from becoming involved. This ‘prohibition’ reaffirmed and reproduced separated gender spheres. The father’s bathing of daughters was thus a very sensitive issue. For a father, the avoidance of tasks that involve corporal proximity was also seen as evidence of care, love and respect. In a family, men and women’s intimate bodily care must be kept separate. Otherwise, family life would be marked by rumours about sex abuse, rumours that were always present,

especially with daughters approaching adolescence or the presence of stepfathers (*padrastrós*). If Carlos talked publicly about ‘not bathing girls’—which surprised me because I thought it was too private even to talk about with many neighbours around—it was because this was considered the correct attitude of a ‘decent man’, a good and respectable father. Perhaps he was telling this more for his neighbours’ sake than for me. It was common to hurriedly move girls in early adolescence to a secure place, where trustworthy female relatives could protect them. In the context of migration, this was even identified as one strong reason for the reunification of adolescent girls with their mothers (see Chapter 4).⁷⁴

Carlos explained moreover that it was hard to be at home without Alba: ‘We all miss her and the girls often cry for their mother. I tell them not to do that on the phone. I say to them, if you cry here [Ecuador] your mother will get sad there [Barcelona]’. This is Carlos’s intensive ‘emotion work’ (Hochschild 2003 [1983]), training the daughters to care for their mother, to avoid bringing more suffering on her. He tried to synchronise the life ‘here’ and ‘there’. Yet the daughters were profoundly sad. Immediately after my interview with Carlos, I asked his 9-year-old-daughter how she felt about her mother. She started to cry after a few words, explaining to me that her mother has gone ‘to work and to buy a house’. This was how Carlos and Alba had explained her absence. A difficult situation, Carlos said, but he seemed to manage the emotional and practicalities of life quite well.

Apart from cooking and cleaning, much of his time as a caregiving father went into diminishing the impact of suffering at both ends, which involved long hours of managing feelings and emotions on the phone and face-to-face. I asked if he had time for friends, with all the domestic responsibility. ‘You know, as a man, I like to take my *traguitos* (alcohol shots) with friends. That happens much less

⁷⁴ In Ecuador, reports and news about the abuse of girls at poor homes are permanently spreading the image of the poor as immoral. As a contrast, Swanson (2007:712) has observed that the abuse of young domestic workers at middle class homes is common, but seldom publicized. Swanson (2007, 2010) describes the choices of young girls of poor families who prefer to beg in the streets of Quito, Ecuador’s main city, instead of working as *empleadas*, a work that will not leave them free to move and to go to school, and where they risked being abused. They regarded domestic work more dangerous than begging in the streets of the city. About abuse of girls in the domestic environment of upper middle classes, see also the scandal of the father of the vice-president of Ecuador: <http://gkillcity.com/articulos/la-vida-los-otros/que-le-diria-nina-doce-anos-que-va-centro-salud-anticceptivos> Accessed January 2015.

frequently now, because I need to help the girls with school homework, give them food and prepare them for the next day. Only then, when all is done, do I go out to see my friends, but only for a couple of hours, no more'. Change had been dramatic in the life of this family but Carlos expressed his feeling of being compensated by the remittances, which led to a higher income, often their only family income. According to Carlos too, they hoped to build their own house, as they often explained to their children. An imagined own house helped to overcome distance and contributed to the children's making sense of their mother's absence (see Chapter 3 about the house).

Beyond Carlos' own personal transformations and adjustments, he had access to a supportive social network in Las Palmas. Many women there had left for Spain or Italy. People were thus used to seeing men, husbands, grandmothers, sisters or young daughters taking over responsibilities of migrant mothers. Carlos did not seem ashamed of doing odd jobs at home, nor of telling us what he did. Fortunately for Carlos, men in domestic life were becoming a socially acceptable phenomenon in towns where migrating wives earned the main incomes abroad. Often, however, the situation was handled as temporary since it was perceived as 'not the proper place for a man'. During my interview with Carlos, he reiterated the importance of remittances and how responsible and hard-working his wife was. The wife's absence made sense if it clearly represented the prospect of economic betterment. If the wife did not provide money from Spain, the man could consider himself as cheated or betrayed. Carlos and Alba had swapped their roles completely. Domestic and care work was done by him and material provision by her.

In another small town of the lowlands, I saw one more example of a man at home with children. He was in a much better economic position than Carlos, but the wife had gone to work in Spain 'for a while', he said. He was getting sick of the demands and missed his wife, struggling with his own desires of seeing her return home. I visited him after having heard how his close neighbours worried about him. Both men and women, especially elderly women in the town, tried to console him. One of those women explained his situation to me: '*Se estaba volviendo loco*' (He was going crazy). The man himself commented on the situation as follows: 'It has been really hard, (*durísimo*), I didn't know it could be like that'. He found it especially exhausting to combine his own business with having a lot to do at home and going to parents' school meetings. He worked at home in his own refrigerator repair workshop. He understood then that

the ‘perfect’ combination of business at home with family life was far from an easy enterprise. ‘I don’t know how women (*las mujeres*), manage that’, he told me. For women who had a home business it was taken for granted that this was the most efficient way to work and have family. For him, it was a chance to understand that being a woman in this way required enormous efforts. ‘Now I understand her’, he said. Pribilsky (2007:250-251) also found that the domestic experiences of young migrant Ecuadorian men in New York opened the doors for a better understanding of the hard work of their wives at home in Ecuador and created possibilities of better marital and family relationships. Men in charge of domestic and caring tasks is becoming another family model in Ecuador, not totally accepted but assumed as temporary.

A better understanding that female work ‘is really hard’ is a reason why one of the first and most popular gifts to arrive at home in the country of origin was a washing machine.⁷⁵ Not only men but also migrating women understood the comfort brought with this appliance, the difference between washing with hands and ‘just waiting’ for the machine to do that the work. I heard a group of women happily expressing that ‘the washing machine had saved their marriages’. Laundry was seen as time consuming and exhausting. Since laundry was also understood as a female issue, a world in which men should not be involved, when a husband was left behind, this gift becomes perhaps more significant. When I arrived in Celia’s house in Ecuador, they had just received a washing machine that was still packed in one side of the small carefully decorated and organised living room.

These two men illustrated that it was not only among the poorest families where men could assume these roles, but that domestic transformations were affecting a diversity of social classes. The man in the better economic position could rapidly reorganise the situation to convince his wife to return. Carlos on the contrary, was living with hopes of migrating ‘very soon’ to reunite with his wife, which posed a question of time. How long would men stand for this situation if they had another choice? The female care chain can come to an end as in the case of Carlos and Alba, where all close female relatives who could have been mobilised to help and care had already migrated. Then, even men had to transform into nurturing fathers who cared daily for children, performing all ‘the things’ at home, not just

⁷⁵ Unfortunately, it also takes away the jobs of *lavanderas* (laundry women), often carried out by the poorest women in a town.

‘helping’ but taking full responsibility. Without the option of buying domestic help, this will happen more and more if women continue to migrate, or if male unemployment grows while women find jobs outside the home. The new regulations of domestic work in Ecuador are likely to contribute to this situation, as has been stated earlier, but the greater transformation in this respect is still unclear (Casanova 2013). Gender practices and ideologies are always in the process of reformulation in regard to family and social life.

Temporality of male care

In this chapter I posed the question of whether there is a kind of ‘male care’ and if so, what could characterise it. As noted earlier, men are the ‘missing link’ (Kilkey 2010) in global care chains research (Locke 2017), which has concentrated on women. With this in mind, I have explored gender transformations through the accounts of couples in their separations and attempts to remain together, in the face of tight work schedules, unemployment and geographical distance. While ideals of separated masculine and feminine spheres remain significant, this chapter has shown that they are also changeable, flexible, and situational. This flexibility is full of ambiguities, uncertainties, and conflicts as some gender expectations remain strong and cause ruptures in daily life. Men and women, however, had no choice but to adjust to their new working and living conditions in order to save their marriages. At the same time, they had contradictory experiences and expressions about this. Women could feel longing for a male provider who made decisions, as well as strong desires for ‘other forms’ of relationships, the ‘companionate marriage’ (Hirsch 2007) or the playful father. An idea of the woman sustained by her man without having to work seems to be desired and imagined as the slot to go back to, even though it was not a reality before migration. This nostalgia should be read against the backdrop of a precarious life abroad, and the fact that distance and a life abroad might have reshaped the ways men and women understand themselves. With all challenges that migration involves, and the ruptures and continuities that life brings, it has been observed that gender changes are

contingent on economic transformations and social and cultural expectations for men and women. ‘Engendering’ the mobility of care reveals that gender roles and identities in issues of ‘male domesticity’ are not fixed categories but that ‘their exact meaning constantly shifts’ (Gutmann 2007 [1996]). In everyday life they may acquire different connotations. Processes of male domesticity are full of ambiguities in both countries, since individuals and their ideals of change and permanence fluctuate among different notions of family, social life, and the adjustments required to make a living.

While an idealised image of a male provider partner persisted, women also strongly desired to see men moving beyond male provision, and being more caring and loving. There was the special case of the left-behind fathers with small children, who would be transformed into ‘house husbands’. They performed attentiveness like a woman (*como una mujer*), while their wives sent remittances. They stayed together through an intensive life of physical and emotional work at a distance and at home with their children. They became mediators between children and the mother, trying to explain why the mother had left, diminishing anxieties in children while constructing meaning for a mother-wife absence. Often it was said that absence was worth the sacrifice because they wanted to construct a house. They explained the female absence as necessary to get access to material resources, and even expressing their mutual commitments through hope of economic betterment. Men were more likely to see this as a temporary condition until the woman returned or the man migrated to join her. Since this male care is a new phenomenon, it remains to be seen what will happen. While men increasingly contribute to household and caring tasks, the hard invisible ‘emotional management’ (Hochschild 2003 [1983])—particularly when marriages are at risk—often seems to be left more to women than men, as observed in problems of infidelity, or in the female task of ‘teaching a man to be responsible’. In any case, active male domesticity is a great relief for women and families confronting the sufferings and uncertainties of transnational life, or the stresses of trying to put together the puzzle of daily life.

In the next chapter I elaborate on gender and intergenerational relations among siblings, and between parents and children, and how transnational circumstances define and redefine ideals of the committed family and individuals’ efforts to mobilise care. This will show the tensions between autonomy and interdependence and will actualize large questions about the future of care. Ideals of *superación*,

or getting ahead, provide another way to observe the struggles in mobilising care across generations and how they generate hopes for the future.

CHAPTER 6 | FOR THE CHILDREN

Schooling, individual goals and family duty

Marta, searching for the exact words to explain her choice of being separated from her children, says: ‘I would love to be here [in Ecuador] with them but I can’t, at least being there [in Barcelona] I can afford their education, because their desire is to get ahead (*superarse*)’. She continues:

My oldest daughter dropped out of the university to help me to take care of her siblings, because if she didn’t, I would be obliged to return to Ecuador. She hasn’t abandoned me. Now she has a commitment (*se ha hecho de compromiso*), I mean, a three-year-old baby . . . I say to the other girls that they should not follow the example of their sister [becoming a single mother], but nobody learns from theory but from experience. I tell them constantly they must get a degree (*un título*) to go forward (*superarse*), to not be humiliated by others. If a woman doesn’t study, she will live like a slave (*esclavizada*) here in Ecuador, as the slave of men.

Through the example of Marta (introduced in Chapter 3) and her daughter Alexandra, I will in this chapter broaden the analysis of intergenerational caring relations, which implies tensions between getting ahead (*superación*) and the commitments of mutual indebtedness. These frictions provide a more complex picture of a family—a source of love, care, spontaneous support, but also of stress and uncertainties about how to form committed yet economically independent individuals.

In the ‘united family’, at least three generations are expected to give and receive mutual support according to changing understandings of the hierarchies of gender and age, while individuals attempt to diminish the risks of downward social mobility and look forward to

getting ahead. In Spanish, getting ahead (*superación*), refers to improvement, progress and development (see Leinaweaver 2008, Paerregaard 2014). *Superación* promises a better future, and it is commonly understood—as Marta indicated—in terms of developing a professional career or occupation that would allow for upward mobility. Writing about Peruvians, Leinaweaver has noted that *superación* has education as its primary referent (2008:116), while Paerregaard observes its relation to work, education and economic status (2014:154).⁷⁶ Moreover, *superación* is not only expressed as an individual yearning, as in the cases observed by Paerregaard (2014:153-156), but is articulated as a positive desire for others, primarily one's children or younger siblings. For this study, an idea of betterment or *superación* is also strongly connected to the material house, the most valued goal to be reached in migration, a source of hope, and the concrete way in which parents take care of their children (see Chapter 3).

Departing from ideas of *superación*, this chapter sheds light on the 'social construction of improvement' (Fog Olwig 2011); that is, how parents and children themselves express and struggle with their particular notions and projects of betterment, while trying to mobilise care along different generations. *Superación* is the idiom in which individuals express ambitions, hopes, tensions and worries about the uncertain future. They particularly worry about who will care when the expected main helping hands acquire their own commitments, or when children grow up, advance and forget their obligations. The paradoxical situation is that while *superación* (in terms of higher education and economic autonomy) provides the means for expanding possibilities for care—the reproduction of new generations of children, the care needed by the elderly and the sick—it also threatens to take the new generations away from family commitments. For *superación* to become care, however, daily engagement is required, with parents and children keeping themselves within a dynamic of mutual indebtedness, amply mediated by affect and material exchanges.

⁷⁶ *Superación* supposes a pre-existing and a future situation. In the discussions of racism, *mestizaje* and nation formation in the Andean Region, scholars have observed that ideas of betterment (or overcoming poverty) are mainly related to shading out an indigenous background, becoming whiter, learning Spanish instead of Quichua, getting an education (Leinaweaver 2008:110-111, Whitten 1981, Colloredo-Mansfeld 1998, Weismantel 1988, Clark 1998). In this context, progress goes together with whitening and is examined with the lens of an ideological national project (See Stutzman 1981), but—as mentioned earlier—not as a living process (Wade 2005).

We will see in this chapter that *superación* is expected to be reached by starting a business or gaining an education, which may provide freedom and economic autonomy. But these are costly endeavours. Money becomes crucial for improvement and for the ability to expand care. Money is also a useful means for migrants to show love and care for people left behind, and it creates the ‘obligation to reciprocate’ for those who receive it (Mauss (1990 [1950])). Furthermore, money management is fundamental in daily life and in the formation of gender roles. As Hart puts it: ‘Today money is both the principal source of our vulnerability in society and the main practical symbol allowing each of us to make an impersonal world meaningful’ (Hart 2005).

The central discussion of this chapter is how particular ideals of freedom and individual *superación* fit or challenge family commitment, principles of reciprocity, mutual help and interdependence, and how this dynamic shapes the possibilities available in mobilising care in a transnational perspective. In order to see the tensions between individual and family goals, I will in this chapter discuss the responsibilities of left-behind children in relation to the handling of money, school and domestic tasks (as these are considered to be vital components of mutual caring relations), and to the constraints of life at a distance.

The next section will describe how children’s education is identified as a main reason to migrate (cf. Parreñas 2005, Yeoh et al 2005, Pribilsky 2007, Yarris 2017), and how the gift of education given by parents creates the exigencies upon children to reciprocate parents’ efforts. Ultimately, children are the future and the reason for migration and for the mobility of care, and it is toward them that parents feel greatly committed to.

Education and debt

In the early 1990s, anthropologist Ann Miles studied poor people in the Southern Andes in Ecuador, a region of intensive out-migration to the United States. She stated that: ‘Ecuadorians have few qualms about the fact that chores are not distributed to children in an egalitarian manner, and the eldest is seen as, universally, the most accountable’ (Miles 1994:141). In the lowlands, this still seems to be

true among members of the Ecuadorian poor and lower-middle classes, particularly in times of scarcity. While birth order and gender shape the form in which responsibility is distributed, the allocation of tasks among siblings is a complex endeavour that creates many tensions. In my study, the eldest of the left-behind daughters were taking or given more responsibility than younger siblings. Alexandra, Marta's eldest daughter, grew up in this way. At 13 years old, she remained in Ecuador to take care of the household and her five siblings. Only her elder brother later reunited with their parents in Barcelona. During her mother's migration, Alexandra was required to replace her, at the risk of her professional career and even her emotional life. Yet, to the same extent, personal improvement, freedom, and economic independence were encouraged for her and her sisters. These values were said to be reached through education, and that migration would provide the resources for it.

Children's schooling is a main reason for migration. It is included in what migrants call the 'better life' they are searching for, far away from their home country. The common expression, 'I want to give my children something better' is often followed by an explanation of the migrant parents' desires and obligations to afford education. The statement mirrors the parents' responses to the prohibitive costs that education has acquired in Ecuador, where cut public budgets have reduced the quality and status of public schools. Moreover, while elementary school is compulsory and free in the country, parents still pay for matriculation fees, school material (*útiles escolares*), and uniforms (*uniformes*). In the outskirts of Guayaquil, mothers with small children calculated that at least 50 US dollars were needed to start the school year for each child. This can be compared to the 292 US dollars per month that was the country's minimum wage in 2012.⁷⁷

Complicating this, public education in Ecuador has been socially devalued following decades of neoliberal reforms in favour of private schools. The so-called international schools (US American, German, French) are considered the best, but they are only the privilege of wealthy and well-educated families in the larger cities. Furthermore,

⁷⁷ Compare this also with social assistance in Ecuador, which has been part of the 'cash transfer programs' that have existed since the 1980s. The programs have received different names as *bono de la pobreza*, *bono solidario*, and in the last years as *bonos de desarrollo humano*. It is a cash subsidy for extremely poor households on condition that children attend school, and mothers and infants undergo health checks (Molyneux and Thomson 2011). Before 2008, social assistance had been 15 US dollars, but for a short period was increased to 30. Poor people were enthusiastic when Rafael Correa's government announced that it would become even higher, 35 US dollars.

the status gained through education in general has also become more difficult to achieve. Getting a job is largely about having good contacts (*palancas*) and, not infrequently for women, ‘good looks’ (*buena presentación*). Yet, education is still regarded as one good way to advance, to *superarse*. In the last decades, the *titulo de bachiller* (secondary degree) and the *titulo de licenciada* (4-5 years at university) have lost their value. At the present time, the master’s degree is becoming the most important degree to get a qualified job.⁷⁸

Mothers like Marta had migrated when their children were at elementary school or starting high school (*el colegio*). Like her, mothers claim that they stayed on in Spain in order to afford the education for their children who remained in Ecuador. Others, who initially thought to bring their children to Spain for university studies, changed their minds when they found the inflated prices of higher education there.

While children’s schooling is a widely accepted reason to migrate, it also gives a sense of identity to mothers in their otherwise devalued lives as domestic workers, cleaners and caregivers in Spain. As stated earlier, many migrant women have seen their status decline in Spain (Gratton 2007) and they wish to avoid this social downgrading for their children. Getting their children an education is a significant goal and source of pride, especially when children graduate from high school (*colegio*) or qualify for a career (*una profesión*). Good grades and attending a formal graduation are very rewarding for parents, constituting visible signs that migration and the sacrifices of separation from children have not been in vain. Thus, a completed education is not only important for the children themselves but is also a marker of growing (or well maintained) status for parents, and especially for mothers. The graduation of a child is a confirmation of being a ‘good parent’ who has been able to pay and orient the child morally. It proves that the child has not interrupted studies by indulging in vice or getting married or pregnant too early, and that parents themselves have not forgotten their children. For a young woman, finding a partner and having children and a family life, are interpreted as hindrances to continuing studies or to completing a career.

⁷⁸ For a discussion on education and the controversies of contemporary political change in Ecuador, see the interesting analysis by scholar and activist Catherine Walsh: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-boM_qMr50 Accessed August 2015.

Furthermore, since education is paid for with resources acquired through migration, this is also a strong argument for migrant mothers to persuade children to study harder in order to acknowledge the mother's sacrifices. Paying for the child's education is not only considered an obligation of a parent, it is also regarded as a gift to the child, which creates a commitment for him or her to give something back. Often, the expected reciprocity lies in obedience and respect, hard study, completing a professional career, supporting parents in their old age, and thus improving the family as a whole. Parents provide and children, in response, respect their parents (*les consideran*) (Pribilsky 2007:128). However, apart from the economic resources spent, the fact of the parents living and working abroad, frequently calling to check how the child is progressing at school, and the permanent remembering of the sacrifice of the migrant mother, makes the obligation to reciprocate more demanding. An important sign of a mother's sacrifice is the arrival of remittances. In order to repay parents properly, the members of the multi-sibling household have to adjust to the priorities of education by distributing the domestic tasks and money management. This adjustment in turn will influence the character of sibling relations, relations to parents, and even decisions about future mobility and immobility.

In our conversations, mothers associated *superación* with education, a road to knowledge and professional skills, but also as a process of gaining moral orientation, and, for girls, a way of achieving independence in a patriarchal society. Marta advised her girls about the importance of their education. 'I tell them to study, that without a degree they will always be slaves and nobody will respect them'. This exaggerated phrasing shows how important the relation between education (*un título*), and accomplishing economic independence is for Marta—herself a school teacher before migration. Daughters were encouraged to become economically independent from their partner or from men in general, whether through education or through starting a business of their own (*un negocio propio*), while the idea of male violence against women was omnipresent. The social problem and the idea that men treat women with abuse and violence (*maltrato y violencia*) are very widespread in Ecuador (see Pontón Cevallos 2009). I observed a father encouraging daughters to have children but not partners, because he was afraid that men would abuse them. He said it was a joke, but he recognised that it was at the back of his mind. Fathers also worried about their daughters' advancement,

emphasising the importance of avoiding boyfriends, while sons were advised to 'take care of sisters'.

Nevertheless, gaining freedom and autonomy does not necessarily mean that girls will make steps toward sexual liberation. Families want their daughters to be sexually and morally demure. Despite being economically autonomous, girls and young women still are expected to be strongly attached to family duties, something which is observable when they are encouraged to substitute for the mother, or when they are urged to study hard to repay their parents' efforts, and to retain respect and obedience toward brothers and fathers. In these families, girls are especially motivated to develop individual responsibility and economic independence, but all of this, it is said, is for the goal of family cohesion (*la familia unida*), and the strengthening of family ties. Emphasising family unity has become more important than ever when facing life at a distance.

Pribilsky (2001:259-260) reports that in rural communities of the South Ecuadorian Andes, subsistence based on agriculture is being rapidly replaced by an economy of remittances, which, beyond offering increased resources for schooling, also make children sick when they do not conform to the exigencies of transnational life. Before, children could reciprocate with household labour, the author notes, but currently they have to do it through obedience and 'conformity' to transnational conditions. In my research, which is focused on urban areas, demands for improvement by studying hard were already there, but become stronger with parents' migration, though this does not apply similarly for all children, as we will see in this chapter. In long-distance relationships of parents and children, expectations of reciprocity, respect and interdependence must be understood in relation to the limited resources to care for different generations in the face of the uncertainties and the intimate requirements of the global economy.

The next section will explain the intertwined relationship between money and gender. It describes how money is at the heart of family conflict but gives hope for *superación* as well. Adults perceive money as a problem between men and women, and girls are trained by their mothers to take care of their finances in order to sustain the family cohesion. Sustaining family cohesion is the way in which different generations ensure that some individuals would still be willing to care. *Superación* is not possible to achieve without money, and money must be carefully saved and used. 'Financial wisdom' is expected from women.

Money, gender and the united family

My research revealed that money was a source of conflict between men and women, but sometimes—especially when things had gone wrong with male management— they could agree that it was best that women took care of the family economy. In migration, it was observed that money circulated in a female circuit. The strong relations of mothers and daughters opened channels to move remittances exclusively between them. Money could even be sent to a young daughter in Ecuador instead of to the husband staying at the same home.

When I asked Alexandra how she could assume all the tasks at home despite being only 13, she admitted that she had not realised the scope of the situation, and thought it would not last for long. She had previously assumed responsibility for her siblings when her parents were busy. She thought at first, ‘Oh, how cool to live only with my sisters!’ Later she understood the magnitude of her responsibility, especially when she wanted to meet friends or go to a party like other adolescents, but first had to go home ‘to see that everything was going well!’ Reacting to my question about whether she thought she had been prepared, she explained: ‘I can’t say I knew everything, but I knew the basics of how to manage money and the house’. She remembered especially that since she was little she had always been given money by her mother and encouraged to take care of it until the moment of need. Then her mother could ask her to use ‘her savings’ to buy and prepare a meal (*la comida*), or to buy ‘whatever was missing at home’. Growing up in this way Alexandra was being prepared to meet the potential scarcities that threatened family life. Training children for life and needing children’s helping hands, other parents gave their children money and let them—even obliged them—to participate early in taking responsibility at home and in family business.

Apart from Alexandra’s story, I have found that saving and hiding money from male partners is a common practice among women. As much as money means betterment and realisation, it may also constitute a source of disagreement. Often, the mother herself hides or saves money, or does so through a daughter. For other non-migrating women in Ecuador, saving and hiding money was regarded as a strategic way to conduct a ‘secret’ project for the well-being of the

family; for instance, to buy a car, an apartment or something significant that everybody could enjoy. The practice of saving and hiding cash for daily expenses through a daughter does not depend exclusively on the quality of marital relationships. Rather, it is a female strategy produced by the generalized idea that men are obstacles to women's and family projects, and especially, that men are not as good as women at saving money or planning for the future. To manage a life of uncertainty and improvisation is mostly associated with female character.

In the Ecuadorian South Andes, Pribilsky (2007:223-224) was told 'that women were "smarter" with money and "más organizadas" (more organized and capable) to manage domestic finances, whereas men were naturally "untamable" (*rebeldes*) with respect to such matters'. The author also describes similarities to what Gelles (quoted in Pribilsky 2007:224) has found in the Peruvian Andes, where it is said that 'women have "hot hands" that hold on to maize and money' (meaning that women are good in taking care of household's economy), while the expression "wind hands" (*manos de viento*) is applied to men, meaning that in their hands 'money and other goods flow too quickly'. Beyond the Andean region, gender differences about money have been highlighted by Carsten (1989) in reference to a Malay community of Langkawi, where she observed that men and women belonged to differentiated but connected worlds. Men earned money in commercial activity with strangers, and brought their earnings to women, who in turn symbolically transformed the money to nourishment of the household and the community, giving money a positive meaning (Carsten 1989:117-141). That is, women and men are involved in different long-term and short-term 'transactional orders' (Bloch and Parry 1989). Short-term indicates 'individual competition, sensuous enjoyment, luxury and youthful vitality', while long-term refers to a 'social or cosmic order, restorative for the community' (Parry and Bloch 1989:23-25).

For Ecuadorians, men and women managing money seems to conform to these differentiated orders, but their activities are not at all circumscribed to determined spheres. Men and women are expected to use money in different ways. Women who apparently do not think in long-term needs, and spend money immediately, are more likely to be criticised for being 'almost like a man', *gastando demasiado* (wasting too much), 'who does not think about his children'. A mother with her young adult children in Ecuador described to her friends in Barcelona that the last time in Ecuador she had problems with her children

because they did not like her to take taxis all the time. ‘They said to me, “Mom, you have to save”. I responded, “What? That is my money. I earned it!”’

Disagreements on how to spend money are common. Women thought of themselves as more determined than men to invest in the family and to think of the future because men were more likely to spend it on leisure activities (see Chapter 5). I add here that women frequently felt they were more exposed to the potential scarcities of life than men, because they had the most immediate daily contact with children, household and schooling—even at a distance in Spain. Women in general seemed to carry a latent risk that in crucial moments male support could fail. A solution was saving money in secret. In addition, this happened in a context of excessive public financial mismanagement (Chapter 1), in which people progressively had become more suspicious about the banks, where various ways of having money at home ‘under the mattress’ were encouraged and positively perceived.

In a fluctuating economy, a lack of savings and an insecure future threatens family cohesion. I observed a discussion between Gloria and Pepe one afternoon in their living room in Barcelona, when the latter lamented: ‘Ay, if I had saved money at that time, but I didn’t!’ (*Ay si en ese tiempo yo hubiera podido ahorrar pero no!*). He did not blame himself for binge drinking and partying with friends, but chided Gloria for not having hidden or saved money: ‘You should have kept the money, even if that implied hiding it from me’ (*Era que guardes plata, aunque sea escondiendo de mi pues!*), he told her emphatically. He referred to the time in Ecuador, when they were young and their business (production of aluminium showcases) was at its best. In fact, growing up amid parents’ constant disputes about money and their hardship in coming to agreement on financial terms, girls and young women interpreted with resignation that they had no other choice than saving by working and hiding cash from male partners. This could not prevent quarrels and save broken relations, but at least some money could be found in case of urgent needs.

Concretely, men and women appreciate money as a resource for daily life and social relations, but it is also believed that men’s social relations go beyond the contours of family commitment and involve a risky sociality related to ‘traditional’ masculine leisure activities. Though men are still expected to be the main providers, they are also more socially allowed to spend money on leisure activities, and in general to have more leisure time than women. The social life of

women on the contrary, is expected to be focused on family obligations, and on making money visibly productive.

This kind of family, with its gendered and intergenerational organisation—shown here with the example of money—is not created by migration. Rather, there are particular forms of distribution of responsibility—as when women exchange roles or substitute one for another—that offer favourable conditions for the migration and long-term absence of mothers and daughters.⁷⁹ There are mothers who motivate daughters to leave, but also young daughters who encourage their mothers to migrate. For instance, Betty’s teenage daughter in Ecuador (Betty is one of Mayra’s friends, also in the Yanbal network) emphasized in an interview: ‘I convinced my mother to go. I heard our neighbour asking if someone in the town wanted to go to Spain. He was lending money and organising the trips. I went home and asked my mother: “What do you do here? Take that chance”. The reason was that she had many problems with my father. He did not give us anything, as he should have. I had my siblings, my grandmother and my aunts around me so I was not alone’. The presence of others who are ‘prepared’ and ‘available’ to take on the mother’s role, particularly caring for the left behind children, is itself a factor that leaves doors open for women to migrate.

‘The small girls don’t help’

Although all children are considered active participants in a network of interdependent individuals, there is no expectation of equal support. The relative contribution varies depending on gender, age and the economic cycle of the family. When there are economic possibilities, the younger sisters’ priorities might be less related to domestic tasks than to the goals of their own education: to earn high grades and become successful professionals. Time to do this can be provided thanks to the oldest sister, grandmothers and others, such as the *empleadas*. When I asked Alexandra who helped her in the domestic tasks, she made it clear that ‘the girls (*las pequeñas*) don’t help, they don’t have time, but they are good students at school!’ She underlined that her sisters’ good school performance was the most important thing. That was why ‘bad performance’ (*pereza*, laziness) in domestic

⁷⁹ See also Yarris (2017:34) for a similar comment about the Nicaraguan case.

tasks was forgiven and accepted. Alexandra said: ‘Yeah, they are *las pequeñas* (the small ones), *las mimadas* (the spoiled ones), especially when my father visits. He does everything for them, plays and cooks. Then they get even lazier’ [laughs].

The relations between elder and younger sisters are constructed around the meanings of responsibility and family commitment. For the eldest, responsibility is immediate and linked to the whole household and family business (if there is one). It can often be identified as an adult’s responsibility. For younger girls, responsibility consists in performing well at school. Such performance is considered as part of a general family goal, and not essentially as fulfilling individual aspirations. They should do well in schools so that the rest of the family will be proud of them. Once they have a career, girls are expected to reciprocate the sacrifices made by the parents. They should find a job and build good connections in the surrounding society, and eventually form a family with ‘a proper partner’. They are not primarily expected to provide material resources for the family or actively help in household tasks, but they should contribute to the ‘good reputation’ of the family name through respectable behaviour and by doing well in school. They ‘help’, but their main obligation is school homework.

The role of the elder sister, however, is to reciprocate in the short-term when parents and the situation of the family so require; for instance, when mothers migrate. Because of this, the youngest sisters may be in a better position to reach higher levels of formal education, especially when there are many siblings and diminishing economic resources. Hopefully, *superación* will come with education, but not in equal terms for all the siblings. Alexandra and her sisters illustrate how different the expectations on daughters of different ages may be within a family. The youngest are considered more likely to receive love and care in the sense of being spoiled. They also have more time than the eldest sister to reciprocate for their parents’ efforts. Help and commitment to family are expected from all children but is conditioned by birth order. Caring relations are asymmetrical (Tronto 2009).

We have seen in this section that responsibility is differently allocated between older and younger daughters following life cycles and changes in the economic capacity of the household. Yet reciprocity of parental sacrifices is expected from everybody, either in the short or long term. The question about brothers still remains. What is expected from them at home and in relation to the surrounding

social environment? How do responsibilities assigned to brothers influence caring relations in a transnational engendered perspective?

Brothers and sons

In a society that has largely privileged men, women are assumed to be in a fragile position as, Marta provocatively put it, ‘slaves of men’. Marta was conscious of this and gave extra encouragement and advice to her daughters to complete a professional career and succeed economically, but also worried that something could go wrong with her sons as well, as she was clear that ‘the brothers were there to take care of the house and the sisters’. While referring to her son’s role during her migration, Marta called him *mi varón* (man),⁸⁰ and claimed that, ‘he stayed as the man of the house’ (*El se quedó como el varón de la casa*). With this, she meant that he replaced the father, protecting the girls and the ‘respect of the house’. Migrant parents saw the importance of leaving girls with a man or an adult, since they could easily become the source of gossip. Ideally, brothers have the commitment to construct respect for the family and sisters in relation to society at large, which in part is done by minimizing gossip. In extreme cases caring for the sisters may include violence against them. Notably, this reproduces gender hierarchies. However, in comparison to the very practical character of the tasks assigned to sisters, such as money management, school performance, domestic and caring chores, a man’s role of creating and reproducing respect is often abstract and ambiguous. This ambivalence creates disagreement among siblings, especially when girls are expected to accept protection and trained to be economically independent and ‘free from men’ at the same time. As a *varón* among a group of sisters, a brother is supposedly freer than girls in his movements out of the household. As a child of migrants, however, he is in daily life subjected to the authority of his oldest sister or the one who distributes money. ‘Even amid quarrels the boy must obey his sister or aunt’, Marta said.

⁸⁰ Strictly, *varón* means man. Ideally, the word carries a meaning of respect. How mothers use it when they say *mi varón*, can be interpreted as ‘my son’, ‘my one and only son’. Its use can also be metaphorical when applied to a little boy who is the only one among many girls, meaning ‘the man of the house’.

Furthermore, with remittances channelled exclusively through the relation between the mother and a daughter, the ideal authority of *el varón* becomes undermined. Alexandra confessed that it was problematic for her brother to accept that the money came to her:

He said I was a woman (*mujer*), and he was a man (*hombre*). Why should he not receive the money if he was the man? My parents for a while sent the money to him, but it became a problem for all of us. My brother was not here [at home] when it was time to buy something. When we needed the ATM card to withdraw cash, we walked around the whole town to find him to ask for the card. It didn't work out.

These quarrels and disagreements reflect gender and intergenerational disputes when migrant parents had changed the way in which money was expected to be distributed. Ideally, it is believed that the man brings the money to the house and distributes it. Ideally too, it is the woman who is responsible that the received money is enough for everything (*la mujer hace alcanzar*). In a group of siblings, however, the migrant mother could think practically that a daughter could make the best use of the remittances and send it directly to her. With all these conflicts, transnational life becomes a sum of different attempts to reach some kind of balance regarding the distribution of resources and responsibilities.

However, not all contributions expected from sons were as abstract as respect. In daily life boys and men could watch small children or help them with homework. They made repairs, took on transport, carried heavy things, painted, and drove cars. These 'male domestic tasks' were less regular and time consuming than cooking, cleaning, caring, and even budgeting. In general, domestic caring tasks are organised in a way that boys have more time to learn to move in the outside world. However, this is also an aspect that in practical terms is quickly changing as explained below.

Girls can also go out, but they mostly do so for well-defined activities, not simply for hanging around (see also Miles 1994, 2000). As observed during fieldwork, increasing numbers of young women study at the university of Guayaquil and learn to drive. They too learn to move in public spaces, becoming more independent, while boys become more dependent on girls to have things done at home, especially when they remain surrounded by sisters and other women. For girls, growing up involves studying hard while doing different

domestic tasks depending on their age, preparing for the uncertainties of life by being capable of achieving economic freedom, and importantly, without losing the hope that it is 'the man who has to sustain the family'. The claim that it is unnecessary for women to study if they will get married and raise children early in life has been forcefully challenged during the past decades. Like Ecuadorian middle classes, the young women in my study will probably get higher education and better income. Unless Ecuadorian society does not envisage strengthening men in domestic and caring tasks, however, the result may very well be overworked professional women relying on paid domestic help, living in relationships that do not share caring tasks. Of course, the exceptional cases such as that of left-behind fathers (Chapter 5) are another kind of development and might be an opportunity for men to find new ways of engaging in care.

In the following I will argue that the mutual dependence among family members in which children are both raised in interdependence, and encouraged to get ahead (*superación*), do not imply that children simply follow what parents decide or suggest. Children react in multiple ways and may reject parents' plans for them. How this is managed in migrant families is not only governed by individual preferences, gender or age hierarchies, but additionally shaped by changing immigration controls in Spain. Overcoming the problems (*superando los problemas*) becomes associated with reunification with parents in Barcelona, but this requires waiting. While waiting, a shared narrative of a future together takes shape, while discussions between parents and children show how money and love intermingle in their attempts to synchronise their lives.

'Standby' feelings and break-ups

A common situation for left-behind children is to be kept in suspense, waiting for a future move to Barcelona. Parents and children do not always have a clear idea of what they will do about this. Beyond their doubts about morality of local youth, and their contradictory conceptions of Spain as a place for getting ahead, reunification does not depend only on parents but also on migration policies. Parents must fulfil the established requirements. As time goes by in this undefined condition, different feelings and conflicts may appear and

threaten *la familia unida* and the ties of mutual dependence. Interacting at a distance, with exchanges of images and recordings but perhaps not having deep conversations with each child, it is difficult for the parents to accept that children have become adults with their own aspirations of forming families or of having a career that parents had not expected. Sometimes parents seemed surprised by their children having a partner or a child; evidence that they had grown up. Also, children sometimes could not exactly understand how parents might change their individual character during a long-term absence.⁸¹ Frustration and disagreement might multiply when parents have promised reunification, which later turns out to be impossible or will take many years to realise. Laws in Spain change regularly, while children grow up in Ecuador, thus shaping the relations of adults and children.

For example, Jimmy in Guayaquil was angry with his parents Pepe and Gloria. Previously Jimmy had shown a positive attitude toward his parents. But things had changed. He said his parents wanted to decide even whom he should marry, and due to that, he had decided to hide his romantic relationships for them. ‘They say “not yet” and insisted that “the right woman” for him is surely in Barcelona’, Jimmy explained. His parents preferred an alternative that made reunification possible. In Barcelona, Pepe often referred to him as *mi niño* (my boy): ‘My boy wants to come here to live with us. That’s why he doesn’t have a woman yet (*no se ha hecho de mujer todavía*)’. One evening when Jimmy came back home after some beers with friends at a football match, he spoke out—for the first time in front of me—about his resentment against his parents’ surveillance at a distance and their insistence that he should come to Spain. Barcelona appealed to him, but the parents’ constant demand that he should postpone his desires to form a family in Ecuador frustrated him. He said, ‘I’m already 26, I should have a wife, a child, an apartment. When, if not now? I don’t want to be an old daddy. How I will play with my children? I have to stop my parents (*decir basta*) from chatting about taking me there [Barcelona]. They always say very soon, *ya mismo, ya mismo*’. Once he had turned 18, the expectations that his parents

⁸¹ How notions of time can be differently measured at home and abroad through exchanging pictures is an interesting issue that I do not develop in this study. For the case of Ukrainian migrants in Italy, see Fedyuk (2012). About the role of pictures in transnational relations, see also Carrillo (2008) for the Ecuadorian case.

would reunify with him as a minor dependent child disappeared.⁸² Since that time, however, his mother had been persistently searching for new ways to bring him to Barcelona, expressing in this insistence her way of caring for him, that she had not forgotten the promise of being together. In fact, the multiple strategies for reunion were a recurrent topic in my conversations with her, and a couple of times I accompanied her to consult lawyers to explore new possibilities for reunion. Jimmy's experience shows the pressures exerted upon sons (not only on girls or daughters) to sacrifice their own aspirations for the sake of the family. He was strongly advised to delay a *compromiso* (a serious relationship) in order to make a life in Barcelona, where 'he will find more or better opportunities', or where 'he will help' [to contribute to higher family income], as Pepe expressed it in our conversations about one of his many business ideas.

It is not just sons who rebel against or criticise their parents. The case of Lucy, who got married instead of starting a business with her parents or leaving for Barcelona as planned, reveals that daughters also oppose parents' ambitions (Chapter 4). Jazmin, Celia's and Juan's daughter, is another case. She lived with her father in La Victoria close to Guayaquil, while her mother had been in Barcelona during the previous decade. She too was tired of waiting to be reunited and had ambivalent feelings about going to Barcelona. She liked the idea of leaving for Barcelona, but mostly it was the idea of travelling and anonymity in a big city that attracted her. She said she was tired of gossip in her small town and could not imagine reaching her personal dreams there. In practice, however, her life was not at all confined to her town. Most of the time she had been studying at the University of Guayaquil, while during the weekdays she lived with her aunt, who took care of her, gave her meals, company and advice, an aunt that moreover kept good relations to her mother. As a tourism student, Jazmin loved travelling around the country and had many friends and contacts across the world. Travelling, however, made her relationship with her father difficult. He opposed her regular trips because he viewed them as dangerous (Chapter 5). Perhaps due to that, she was very enthusiastic about having reached adult age: 'Now that I am 18 I don't have to ask him for permission; I only say I'm leaving and indeed, I just go!' She was also angry about the lack of

⁸² Spanish law does not cater for reunification with adult offspring, and allows it only in special cases. To be reunified after 18 years old, parents have to prove that their children are economically dependent on the parents and not able to gain economic autonomy in the country where they have been left.

father's financial support. Disgusted, she said: 'My dad? He thinks I need only a few dollars for the bus'.

Jazmin recognised the efforts of her mother and interpreted the different relations to her mother and father in terms of financial support, depending on who made possible her lifestyle, her education and freedom of movement. She felt that her mother knew her daily needs best, though she was not there. Certainly, money has the power to shape obedience, and she felt more likely to listen to and obey her mother than her father. Her parents told me of their ambition of bringing her to Barcelona to get an international degree, but she was 'eager to see the world', and she wanted to get away from her father and her town even sooner. She went to Chile at the end of my fieldwork. Later, as I kept connected with them by Facebook, I observed that her mother returned to Ecuador to join her husband, but Jazmin was no longer there. Unlike Alexandra, Jazmin had no younger siblings to think about. In what concerned her decisions and allocation of remittances—which she, not her father, got directly in her bank account—she did not need to think about siblings, but about herself and her relations to an extended family, especially her aunt and her beloved elderly grandmother. She also wanted to be careful about disappointing her mother. She felt she could prove that being free and travelling around, she was mature enough to fulfil her career and not get into a commitment too early. She compared herself with her schoolmates: 'Uhhh, all of them already have a partner or are expecting a child!'

One issue that made Jazmin hesitant about Barcelona was the situation of her brother there. He had been reunified with his mother many years ago, but what she had seen from his example was not especially attractive to her. Her brother had no higher education. From being a day labourer at a banana plantation in Ecuador, a *jornalero*, he had become an irregular migrant in Barcelona, working as a *cargador* (stevedore) in *La Boqueria*, a big food market of the city. After many years, he had a partner and two small children but still no legal status in Spain. Jazmin and her brother's lives had taken different paths. The better life and opportunities that parents initially envisaged for their children were not necessarily found in Spain. Certainly, the ideas that circulate about migration and known examples of migrant youngsters shape the course of the social life of those young people who do not migrate. They shape their decisions and their plans for future careers and family formation.

Jazmin and Jimmy are both young adults who tired of promises of going to Barcelona and decided to make their own life decisions. They stopped waiting for reunification, refusing to have a life on standby with that feeling of constantly waiting for something to happen. Jimmy was angry because he felt he was not 'fully in command' of his life (Khosravi 2014). When children of migrants have been promised reunification, they must live with the feeling of waiting in limbo during the years the promise is imagined as possible. As parents wait in Spain to hear from the authorities or to fulfil the basic requirements for reunification, the youth wait in the home country. Waiting is an essential feature of migration, as Khosravi's work has demonstrated (2014, see also 2017). Sometimes, young people construct their lives on illusions that perhaps never materialize. At other moments, they dream about how to escape mobility without hurting their migrant parent's feelings.

Jazmin and Jimmy are also examples of how Spain's changing laws for reunification influence the lives of youth in Ecuador. After the age of 18, children could not be reunited with their parents as minors, but the parents continued to search for different alternatives. For example, parents could try to 'buy a work contract', which means coming up with an agreement with a business owner (employer) and fictively (sometimes actually) signing a work contract that would allow the individual in question to travel to Spain legally. Other strategies were to make an invitation for an international event like the Olympic Games or suggest to the children that they could study in Spain in order to obtain a student visa. These strategies constitute a way of prolonging this standby for reunification, this feeling of hope, not only for children, but for parents as well. At the same time this represents another way in which migrants show their left-behind families that they matter, that they had not forgotten them, and that parents remained committed to the family. To remain a family, parents and children have to take care of their relationships, amply mediated by money, gifts and shared narratives of togetherness and sacrifice.

When the waiting has ended, there is a new space of freedom for children's personal realisation, the freedom to choose to not migrate without disappointing the parents, or to go somewhere else besides Barcelona, like Jazmin did. For Jimmy, this was eventually a way of freeing himself from the pressure of parents, to study in his own rhythm, and to form his own family as he wanted. He was still ashamed, however, of not yet having a wife and children. He knew

that this in part was due to his own past expectations of going to Barcelona.

Young people do not always just wait for reunification, becoming highly charged with feelings of—in Crapanzano's words—'helplessness, powerlessness and vulnerability' (1986). But they also get tired of waiting and may refuse to go, even if migration is a powerful force that transforms whole families in unexpected ways. Transnational life is full of difficulties, perhaps when a desired reunification becomes impossible, or when a child is forced to reunite, or because of children's ambiguous feelings, or even because of parents' feelings of insufficiency and failure. In the middle of conflicts, money becomes the only form of care that parents can transmit to their children.

But for money to serve as care a lot of energy, time, invisible strategies of communication and, in general, hard 'emotion management' are necessary (Hochschild 2003 [1983]). Kwon (2015:480-481) observes that 'waiting' implies a sort of 'affective unwaged work', which refers to the multiple efforts that people make to care for money and love, in order to create 'wealth and a better future' and to sustain long lasting yet vulnerable transnational relationships. For my Ecuadorian research respondents, money did not only have instrumental goals, but produced dreams of future, and helped to retain the imagination of a future together. Although there is always a risk for misunderstanding, money may be transformed into care, travelling more easily than people and providing some relief for these fragile relationships. In the next section I focus on the intermingling of affective bonds and money.

The fragile balance of money and emotions

Money, more than just being a means of consumption, also encourages affective ties, hope, obedience, and *superación*, as well as opening spaces for new conflicts. In return for their parents providing for them and their education, children not only need to study hard and show compliance, but also to demonstrate love and care to help maintain smooth relationships from a distance.

Jazmin was more likely to obey and listen to her migrant mother who sent remittances and offered support. With respect to her father,

Jazmin had a series of complaints about his restrictions, his desires to control her movements, and his failures to provide enough and to understand her daily needs. For Jazmin and many other children with migrant parents, both material and emotional support were important to retain their attachment to the parents, and to offer them respect and obedience. This does not mean that the relation is based on crass personal interests. Mainly, it is part of the broader understandings of exchange and mutual support upon which intergenerational relations are constructed. Receiving money demonstrated to the children that parents worried and were thinking about them. Children were more willing to be obedient and to pursue a degree when they received regular remittances from their parents.

Marta believed that communication and money could not be separated from her relationships with her children at a distance. After 12 years of living apart from her five now grown children, Marta firmly believed that communication (dialogue and understanding, she said) was the best way to keep a family on good terms at a distance. Beyond ongoing communication, she accepted with resignation the crucial role of money in distant family relations. She said: 'How can we parents complain when our children ask for money? I think it's so sad when I hear parents on their phones talking with their children and saying that they only ask for money. We have gone away; we have left them in order to send them money or things we buy for them of course! How can we complain?' She called her children two to three times a week. Her daughters called when they needed her to call back. She provided each of them with mobile phones and credit. She recalled that she had herself bought a lot of cheap phone cards and went to *locutorios* for longer but even cheaper conversations. She said: 'But it was not enough, I didn't become calm once I had talked to them. I could not say that I was going to sleep relaxed. I always kept an extra card with me at night to be able to call at any moment. Imagine if something happened unexpectedly!' This 'imagine if', the possibility that something may happen, kept her in a state of watchfulness, always looking at her phone. This is another way in which time passes and consumes a lot of energy, part of the daily care that is offered in silence. With all this done, Marta still described her migration as the 'abandonment' of her children, and worried that perhaps they never would forgive her for having left. She did her best anyway, and being in Barcelona, she could at least afford education and health care, food and school material for them. She emphasised many times: 'I hope they understand that someday . . . everything I do

is for their best'. She recognised, however, that some things would never be quite the same due to their long-time absence, but in relative terms, the children were doing well.

Beyond material satisfaction, money is a means to build positive relations between parents and children. However, parents did not welcome showing direct interest in money during the phone conversations. Children in turn, did not like being questioned. They wanted more spontaneous 'natural' chat. At a distance, both parent and child tend to idealise the relationship and have pre-conceived ideas about how the other is and in which tone the conversation should be maintained. Parents wanted to hear words of affection when they called. For children who had not seen their parents for many years, it was difficult to express affection while talking on the phone, because they were not used to doing so. Many children did not want to talk on the phone at all. Relatives taking care of silent children often explained to me that it was because 'the child is shy' (*tímido/a*). Ruth and Jimmy, the children of Pepe and Gloria, did not talk directly to their parents on the phone. Only Lucy—the eldest sister—did so. Ruth was shy, Jimmy was angry. Yet, the fact that a child asked for money and the tone in which she or he did it, could be also interpreted as a search for proximity, and a desire to maintain the mutual relations of support within the family. This could please parents. That children asked for money also made parents feel that they were still important, still needed, still the providers, and still those who could have an opinion about their children's decisions. If money from parents abroad was still important, this also made 'the sacrifice of migration' meaningful. Individuals navigated this fragile relationship of money and emotions daily.

Not all children felt comfortable asking for money and parents had their own ideas about who needed money and when. Since Jimmy was single, for example, the parents thought they had a greater say over his decisions, and that he needed less money, which made him frustrated. Jimmy got angry when the parents sent 500 US dollars to Lucy to help her to start her pharmacy but not to him. The parents had to justify their choice to Jimmy: 'She [Lucy] doesn't want money (*plata*) to waste. We give it to her to start the business (*para poner el negocio*), he has to understand it'. Jimmy and his parents always had to communicate carefully, and they often did so through Lucy. With Jimmy the parents had to think strategically, cautiously choosing their words and the kind of help they gave or denied him, and taking the consequences of daily decisions. The fragility of these relations

mediated by money and technology give an idea of the complicated and time-consuming efforts that communication involves for parents and children. They often felt like they were standing on a slippery terrain where they could fall down easily.

Regarding small children, elder sisters and grandmothers in charge of them had a lot of activities to deal with daily, including motivating them to keep a vivid picture of their parents. They had to persuade the small (and not so small) ones to love and not forget their parents, creating the proper environment and feeling at the time of conversations on the phone. Such efforts with small children consisted in showing them pictures, handing them the telephone, preparing them before the calls, and in the best cases, letting the parents and children see each other in web cameras. The children were told not to cry, but to show affection and happiness. The parents sent pocket money to the youngest ones to keep them thinking about their father and mother, and for small things like ice cream. I remember that Ruth frequently got five dollars. The adults delivered it while telling her: 'This is what our parents have sent to you'. Curiously, she did not run immediately to buy an ice cream or candies, but she used it to go the video shop on the corner and rent a movie to watch together with the rest of the family. She wanted everybody (even me) to enjoy a moment together. She really took care of that money, spent it slowly over several days, and got visibly angry when she thought someone could take it away from her.

The parent would even stop allowing for conversations when they thought their children were talking too much about money and problems. Then, misunderstandings usually escalated. Lucy complained that her father Pepe in Barcelona did not let them talk with their mother: 'He doesn't want us to call and ask my mother for things or money, or to tell her too many problems. You know, sometimes he doesn't allow us to talk to her at all. He said it is because my mother suffers and feels pressured by such talk'. Pepe's management of this world of emotions perhaps protected his wife from new worries, but it was translated by their children as his own egoism. Thus, emotion work that may produce well-being for parents in Spain could create new conflicts in Ecuador. This reflects the difficulties of balancing relations at a distance, and the ambiguous character of caring, the same attitude meaning either affection or neglect for the implicated individuals. Relevant here is that, as Constable accurately observes, care and control cannot be considered only 'two sides of the same coin', but we should pay attention to the

complex implications involved in binary assumptions of ‘control from above and care from below’ (2019:2-3).

In the face of conflicts, the possibility to send money is an opportunity to mobilise care and keep the family alive by reviving mutual obligation, through long-distance and long-term separation. Receiving money reminds children to reciprocate. How much money is too little to mean love and to secure obedience and loyalty in return? How much money is too much, enough to spoil children growing up at a distance, forming egotistical individuals who forget their reciprocal obligations? These are central, quotidian questions in migrant life. How can one manage this balance between money and material things on one side, and the expression of feelings on the other, in order to allow a permanent reconstitution of affective ties to keep the family united and within the framework of the moral indebtedness? Because money and feelings are intertwined, the reproduction of strong ties depends on the construction of such a balance. In closing, I summarize the story of the reunification of Ruth, which happened after a year of fieldwork. Ending with Ruth’s story, I want to return to the issue of family commitment, the source and force of care across generations.

In Barcelona

Mothers agreed that it was better if children were first raised with ‘our customs’ (*nuestras costumbres*) before they were moved to Spain. That way, the children would supposedly be less malleable to follow the lifestyles of local youth, with ‘too much sexual liberty’ among girls, and ‘no respect for the elderly’. ‘Families in Spain are not as united as they are in Ecuador’, said Marta, when explaining why they had decided not to bring their children to Spain. Whatever the age and the reasons, parents generally made the decision to relocate their son or daughter to Spain when he or she was considered ‘out of control’ by the people providing care in Ecuador, as long as the legal requirements were already fulfilled. This could be a drastic and unexpected decision. Other times, reunification could be the realisation of a long-existing idea, for the fulfilment of a promise, or because it was understood that the child could be better off in Spain than in Ecuador. In any case, reunification constituted one more

expression of the mutual indebtedness and support between parents and children.

As I discussed earlier, Ruth and Jimmy had been left with their half-sister Karen and they shared a house with their grandmother Anita. When I met them, their other sister Lucy came to play a decisive role, moving with her small children to another apartment in the same barrio as Ruth and Jimmy. Things were coming to an order that the siblings found more convenient. Gloria (Ruth's mother) said that Ruth had always protested against being left with Karen rather than with Lucy. Ruth had emphasised the fact that Karen had been brought up in another household. Ruth's preference for Lucy reflected that, when a mother migrates, the most convenient relatives or individuals to leave children with are the relatives who they already shared a residence with. The departure of the mother could then be handled in the smoothest way. Understanding that, Lucy felt a great responsibility for Ruth and Jimmy. She said that the whole time she was living in another province, the idea that something bad could happen made her extremely anxious, producing a strong desire in her to be 'transportable in the phone line, like the sounds of the voices'.

In the summer of 2008, Ruth finally arrived in Barcelona. Ruth described to me her moment of arrival and seeing her mother. 'I almost didn't recognise her in the airport. She was so beautiful!' Since then, she had become the main local support for her parents Pepe and Gloria. She connected the parents to a new world, that of the school and the internet technologies. She helped them to manage the internet to search for jobs and to use Facebook, Yahoo, Messenger and Skype, which facilitated the circulation of information for the whole family. It was Ruth who kept them updated about everything that happened in Ecuador, and who told the siblings in Ecuador about what was going on in Barcelona. Gloria said she was waiting for the day when Ruth would be 18. She will then buy her a car and get her a driver's license. With hope and without hesitation about a daughter's obligation to help her parents when they get old, Gloria said: 'We need to go everywhere, to the doctor, to buy something, we'll get old'. When I met them again during another visit to Barcelona, they were able to speak better Catalan than they had before, because they had learned a lot from Ruth who took all her classes in this local language. Pepe escorted her daily to school after breakfast and he would continue to do that 'until she gets accustomed', and he helped her with her homework. Immersed in the Spanish crisis, the parents had lost their jobs. Yet, they still managed daily life and supported Ruth in her new

dream of studying in England to be a lawyer, or whatever she wanted in the future. Ruth's parents wanted to support her until she became an independent professional. 'Then', they said, 'our responsibility stops'.

The predicament of mobilising care

This chapter has presented the struggles and contradictions involved in the process of reproducing families who can provide care, support and improvement for their family members, not only for the present but also for future generations. Education and business—as well as the house, as seen in a previous chapter—are concrete expressions of progress and improvement (or *superación*), offering hope for individuals. Pursuing these goals, however, simultaneously puts a desired secure future based on family commitment at risk. As we have seen, ideals of betterment and autonomy sometimes collide with expectations of reciprocity and life-long interdependence.

While the family is separated, the goals of improvement for children require the parents' attention to distribute obligations. Responsibility (to help in domestic tasks, to protect each other, to study hard) is distributed among the children according to differences of gender and age in order to sustain family cohesion (*la familia unida*), which migrant families persistently try to preserve. In a way, in the stories of this chapter, the Ecuadorian families are reproducing a hierarchical organisation in these households in order to secure care for left-behind siblings. Yet the fact that mothers are absent, that remittances are in female hands, that daughters are offered freedom and economic autonomy, challenge fixed ideas of patriarchal patterns. There is a struggle to produce harmony and family cohesion at a distance, not through western notions of equality in which men and women are supposed to have similar rights and duties, but by allotting different roles to each child, creating interdependence among children, and between children and adults.

We have observed in this chapter that family life itself consists of attempts to create a daily balance between 'modern' values of freedom, individuality and economic autonomy on the one hand, and family commitment and obligation to home on the other, and to distribute these aspirations among younger and older siblings and between boys and girls at different stages of the life cycle. In doing so,

money, frequent communication and material provision are necessary tools, while a shared aspiration for togetherness—the united family—keep individuals envisaging open possibilities for mutual support even at a distance, as well as imagining a future of progress with well-educated younger generations. Of course, children may rebel and will not always follow their parents' desires.

The mothers' arduous efforts to create material possibilities, as well as educated, obedient, respectful (*respetuosos*) and collaborative children, are some of the ways in which families practically (though not always consciously) attempt to sustain each other, also in a long-term perspective, overcoming the risks of abandonment and poverty in their elderly years. It is crucial to retain principles of solidarity and reciprocity, respect and obedience between different generations when resources for elderly and children are scarce or face cuts in national economic plans. Of similar importance is that adults have access to good jobs and salaries in order to contribute to the family. Parents, however, insist that they do not want to be a burden for their children. Nevertheless, in the end, they will not have any other choice than to become just that. As they age, they are unable to pay for their own care due to the lack of societal investments and institutional care.

In sum, by encouraging solidarity and reciprocity, families also reproduce structures of power and hierarchy. This is the only way to secure care for children, the elderly and the sick in societies where neither the state nor the market have responded to the individuals' needs for their daily reproduction. There is an urgent necessity to encourage redistribution for the sustainment of dignified individuals, a need to rethink the allocation of responsibility. In these circumstances, as proposed in the ethics of care, interdependence—the most permanent source of care—should be recognised as the key issue of human life, neither the anti-value of individualism nor an aberration, but as the necessary basis for everyday life. Ferguson puts this well: 'Social policy, in particular, should not treat "dependency" as a disease—the task is not to eliminate dependence but to construct desirable forms of it. We still don't know what those are. But the goal should be not an end to dependence, but a plurality of opportunities for beneficial forms of it' (Ferguson 2013:237).

CHAPTER 7 | CONCLUSION

Mobilising care across social and geographical distance

As flexibility, precariousness and uncertainty have come to characterize working life in the global economy, the number of women migrants has progressively increased, and families have been compelled to develop novel arrangements of care. Under these circumstances, the reorganisation of family and care need to be analysed in dynamic terms, following economic and social transformations within and beyond national borders. In the context of international migration, the sustainment of caring relations has required coordination between migrants and those who stay at home. At the same time female migrants are compelled to synchronise their lives with supportive employers. We have seen in this study how women and men cross national borders and transgress gender and social conventions. However, it is predominantly women who make possible these transnational lives and the reproduction of social and family relations over significant temporal and geographical distances.

While observing the persistence of the family and family relationships, even at the level of the labour market, this thesis has shed light on contemporary reconfigurations of care. This final chapter is an overview of the main topics of this study. It aims to describe the basic elements in the argument for the mobilisation of care, highlighting a 'moral practice' through the description of the dynamics of giving and receiving care for these Ecuadorian women and their families.

Moving the global care chains

This study had its starting point at a time when gender and migration scholars strongly stressed ideas of care in the mother-child unity following the global care chain model. From this perspective, female migration came to disturb the supposed harmony and the taken-for-granted daily presence of the mother. The global care chain assumed a universal nuclear family and a universal form of intimacy (for critics, see McKay 2007, Sørensen 2005, Yeates 2005, 2012). Scholars warned of the risks of care chains missing the ‘nuances surrounding emotions and forms of intimacy’, reducing family dynamics to the idea of the ‘present mother’, and to a particular kind of morality and ‘family values’ involved in the normative heterosexual family (Sørensen 2005:12, see also Sørensen 2008).

With these reflections in mind, this study has moved beyond global care chains, deficits and surplus, to highlight the complex and dense webs of care that are expansive but also unstable. My descriptions aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the practices as well as the moral and affective forces that sustain women in their care work, and help them endure transnational life on a daily basis. Placing emphasis on the diverse understandings and changing character of caring relations and family life, this thesis reveals the complexities of family and care, the fuzziness of both concepts, and the need to analyse them as mutually entrenched. By offering a portrait of mundane topics embedded in global constraint and opportunity, the chapters have provided a description of the intricate dynamics of family and care. Caring daily for each other, for their homes, their relationships, for their families and social life, involves enormous efforts that often remain hidden. It is in the dynamic between face-to-face and long-distance forms of intimacy, entangled with the requirements of state migration regimes, that this thesis has brought individuals’ physical and moral efforts and sacrifices to light. That is, transnational caring relations have been observed through the different forms in which Ecuadorians perceive their daily routines of care and sociality, while filling the care slot left behind by different women at home and in the labour market.

This thesis has problematized normative theoretical frameworks and conceptual dichotomies in which care has been understood in the intensification of female migration. Approaching the global care chain perspective critically, this thesis is an effort to read caring relations in

terms of ‘relatedness’ (Carsten 2000), reducing the idea neither to the contours of the nuclear family nor to the exploitative force and source of women’s subordination. The study has placed emphasis on creativity in managing and coordinating a shared desire for togetherness through practices of care. The critical idea that care is mobile and dynamic has been inspired by work on the gift economy (Mauss 1990 [1950]), as care becomes a gift that circulates, demands a return, and creates social ties and solidarity.

But what is the motor (*hau*, see Mauss 1990 [1950]) that moves the gift of care? Perhaps we can say it is the feeling of being in debt. Though, as seen in these chapters, some debts are never repaid, feelings of being indebted are the basis of social life (Graeber 2014). This reveals other perspectives on care, which cannot be simply contained in relations of exchange and reciprocity, but also includes imbalance and failed reciprocity, ‘loss and sacrifice’ (Pyyhtinen 2016). On the one hand, women themselves experience their own migrations, family separation, and performances of low-status jobs in the country of arrival in terms of sacrifice and lack of recognition. On the other hand, these narratives of sacrifice (as well as that of the house or a promise for betterment, or reunion) also contribute to family cohesion through an understanding of absent mothers, as has been pointed out in different chapters. Care, however, like the gift, is always enigmatic, retaining contradictory meanings and contingent upon social-economic transformations, historical situations and life expectation.

The time of this study

The time of this study coincides with the downturn in the Spanish economy, the stabilization, growth and then decline of the Ecuadorian economy, and the emphasis of both governments on the migrants’ return to the home country. These factors, together with the gradual reinforcement of restrictive migration policies of recent years, have strengthened migrants’ feelings of being ‘mobile’ as well as their desires, attempts and obligations to nurture transnational bonds more than ever. The long-term effects of the global crisis that exploded in 2008 brought hardship to Ecuadorians in Spain, and new incentives for mobility to other countries. It is under these circumstances that the

Ecuadorian migrant families I met had been managing their caring relations for more than a decade. Simultaneously, as hopelessness was brought by the 2008 global crisis in Spain, Ecuador had been experiencing dramatic changes since 2007, with the promises of ‘post-socialist’ or ‘post-neoliberal’ political leadership.⁸³ These promises offered Ecuadorians a sense of optimism, yet, as time went by, they also came to realise and recognise this discourse as a source of new uncertainties.

The ideas of returning to Ecuador or moving on to Europe and of the United States, were—and still are—permanently present, in the ongoing search for ‘a better life’. In the end, when migrants have to recurrently move—or believe they have to move—from one place to another, from one crisis to other, they might feel like *‘deshechos del sistema neoliberal’*, (leftovers of the neoliberal system), as Liliana Suarez Navas has put it (2015). Yet, Ecuadorians also recognise the advantages of their migration, and for many of them separation has not meant the rupture of family bonds. When financial crisis threatens life everywhere, when the world seems to be changing and unstable, families come to be perceived as the most reliable institutions, to which dispersed Ecuadorians aspire and struggle to belong to. With the intensification of mobility and the desire for mobility, in the end only the family remains and provides a sense of permanence with its flexible ambiguous forms, over great geographical distances and extended periods of absence.

This persistence is evident, for example, in remittances to Ecuador that after a relative drop around the crisis 2008, have been increasing since 2015.⁸⁴ Remittances ‘did not collapse’ and transnational family life remains relevant (Herrera 2012:131, 134). This confirms that ‘migrants’ capacity to remit does not necessarily contract in direct proportion to economic downturn’ (Boccagni and Lagomarsino 2011:287). Family commitment becomes stronger, though shot through with ambiguity and fragility. As we have seen in the different chapters, the united family, or *la familia unida*, is perceived as a source of belonging, a network of connections where

⁸³ For broad analyses of this period, see for example, Lalander and Ospina 2012, Bebbington and Bebbington 2011, Boccagni and Lagomarsino 2011, Escobar 2010, Lind 2012, Martínez Novo 2014.

⁸⁴ World Bank Data. Personal remittances, received (current US dollar). World Bank staff estimates based on IMF balance of payments data.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT?locations=EC>
(Accessed April 18 2019).

individuals manage economic crisis, and the site where the ‘crisis of care’ is dealt with. Contradicting the view of the ‘total destruction’ or ‘total suffering’ within the families—characteristic of the global care chain model, the media and specialised reports—and with a critical approach to family idealisations, this study of the Ecuadorian case has come to complicate the overly simplistic picture of female migration.

In relative terms, Ecuadorians had been lucky to arrive in Spain in the late 1990s with abundant job opportunities. They had brought parts of their families, bought apartments, and gone through different processes of regularisation. They had even been ‘accepted’ when it was time to reject other migrants coming across the Mediterranean Sea (see Martín Diaz, et al. 2012). Scholars have observed how official discourses written with an ‘alarmist tone’ have stressed the ‘shared heritage’—language, culture, and religion—between Latin America and Spain, a convenient framework for including some migrants while excluding others (Pedone 2006:22, see also Stolcke 1993). Ecuadorians were first ‘welcomed’ as labourers, but when they started to bring their spouses, parents and children, ‘migrant children’ became the centre of official debates and news about gangs and criminality (Feixa, Carles et al. 2008:63-78, see also Queirolo Palmas 2005, Martín Diaz et al. 2012), discouraging parents from bringing their children from Ecuador.

The 2008 crisis complicated life for Ecuadorians, who became increasingly unemployed, pushed out of the care labour market by Paraguayans and Bolivians, who were newly arrived and cheaper labourers. Previously, in the same discriminatory dynamic, Ecuadorians had pushed Colombians, Peruvians and Dominicans out of the labour market. Other conflicts for Ecuadorians at this time affected those who had bought houses and apartments. When the housing bubble burst, they lost their homes and were caught in debt. Others, more fortunate, like Jessica in this study, sold their apartment at the right time and returned to Ecuador. However, a massive return to Ecuador was not observed, contrary to the governments’ efforts concerning ‘go home’ policies (see Boccagni and Lagomarsino 2011). During the years of this study, Ecuadorians remained relatively enthusiastic, but were going through serious difficulties to realize their dreams of new houses and cars, or to save the amount of money they had desired, but they had also become settled, not only in Spain, but in between, in a transnational life condition which they had to manage daily, mobilising care ‘here’ and ‘there’. This ‘in between’ means moreover not only the route between Ecuador and Spain, but the

ambivalence about where was the best place to live, where was the 'good life'. This question stayed with many Ecuadorians, and during my fieldwork they often approached me with their curious questions about living and working in Sweden. Others never abandoned a dream of going to the United States, though most would never get there.

The weight of the family

This thesis began with an apparently simple question: Who cares when a woman leaves home? Other, more specific questions followed from this: Is the quality of care transformed when it is transferred to others? Does this lead to a so-called 'care crisis'? To offer a response, 'mobile care' was developed as the main category of analysis as it allowed for a description of the movement, dynamics, diversity, and different faces of caring relations. Care consists of multiple and ambiguous dimensions: love, money, burden, joy, sacrifice, debt and surveillance. It is material and affective, it affects others, and acts upon us. This ethnography of female migration has raised relevant questions about how families and care labour markets make and remake each other in processes of economic globalization and under increasing migration controls.

As pointed out in Chapter 2 in Lupe's story, relations between migrant caregivers, their elderly employers and relatives were often kind and positive, something that initially surprised me since the literature had focused on women's subordination and inequality. In their own stories, Ecuadorian women presented themselves as highly dedicated and profoundly attentive when their employers were big-hearted and understanding. The topics concerned how comfortable employers felt with the staff, how much employers needed their caregivers and how the caregivers reciprocated. Neither obedience nor submission were highlighted in the stories. I wanted to portray these women and their families by taking seriously their words of sacrifice and devotion, searching for the complexities of their understandings of care, instead of taking for granted female subjugation and exploitation.

My respondents working as caregivers frequently described how they reciprocated the employers' generosity with extra hours and what they termed 'better quality' labour, in which they did their best and

always more than required. This resembles patron-client bonds in which two individuals from different socioeconomic positions, with highly unequal levels of power, involve themselves in a kind of ‘instrumental friendship’ that brings mutual benefit and includes an element of affect (Wolf 2001 [1966]): 179-181). Lupe and Aracely both dedicated their work time and off hours to cultivate these relations, accommodating their schedules and daily lives to the requirements of their employers.

Women’s affective accounts of their work in Spain led me to reflect on the positive attitude and even pride they showed over a mix of familial and affective relationships that their work entailed. The management of emotion, ‘producing the proper state of mind in others’ (Hochschild 2003:7), was central to their labour and crucial for their chances to stay on at the same job and in the new country. In contrast to the work of Hochschild on emotional labour, however, I see the space of work and associated forms of intimacy as a place for creativity, for life possibilities, and for the broadening of the social world for migrants and their employers, especially elderly Spaniards. Personal intimate relationships within domestic care work revealed not only social hierarchy, but also joy, while appearing as a bargaining site where feelings, emotions and tangible assets were in constant movement. All this creative process was ongoing despite (but also due to) unequal labour relations. Shared conceptions of family, principles of sacrifice and generosity, and long traditions of domestic work in countries of origin and arrival contributed to this. Going beyond an emphasis on the workers’ subordinated position in the socioeconomic structures—a topic that has been repeatedly observed (e.g., Anderson 1999, 2000; Parreñas 2001)—proved to be useful in opening new spaces for understanding female migration. I broadened this emphasis on subordination to include the complexities of how care is being reorganised in global times, especially the varied and ambiguous ways in which domestic care workers understand their jobs, trying to make sense and finding meaning and purpose in it. After all, care must be analysed in its grey zones, among the feelings of anxiety and worries, on one hand, and the pleasures of sharing care, on the other hand.

With these reflections, I observe that the gift of care and caring labour (re)create and fashion each other, which is more visible in the persistence of the process of ‘familiarisation’ in the labour market. Yet the links between gift and paid care remain hidden behind the facades of responsible, employable, competitive workers, organised families, well-raised children, clean homes, and ready meals.

Feminists challenged the separation of the private-public with the slogan 'the personal is political'. Theories of the global care chain did something similar, bringing international links to light, but in daily life domestic care labour remains firmly embedded in affect and sacrifices, gifts of attentiveness, in the chemistry between employers and employees. Ecuadorian families fit into the care crisis in Spain, since migrant women came to substitute an already absent women-mother-daughter-wife at home who had in turn joined the labour market. Beyond filling a vacuum in Spain, Ecuadorian women's arrival reflects a persistent process of 'familiarisation' of the local welfare system, with the increasing demands for domestic workers, caregivers, and even the active presence of local grandmothers in the puzzle of daily life (Tobio 2012a, see also 2012b). The thesis illustrates the predominance of families and family relationships in organising the market for care, drawing attention to the heart of the processes of globalisation that rest on personal affective family bonds, not only transnational corporations and new technologies.

The care labour market in Barcelona adopts the form of family relationships, that is, patron-client bonds with exchanges of favours and gifts, in a mix of affect and money. Beyond income and legal documents, migrant women understand their jobs in the form of family commitments, highlighting attentiveness and dedication, spontaneity and sacrifice as critical in retaining their jobs. This led to other questions: what is the base, the force, of this imagined family? What does this infrastructure of care look like? Following this, the chapters examined the multiple factors that form the basis of moral predispositions and practices of daily caring present in the organisation of Ecuadorian families: feelings of commitments and attentiveness, improvisation and shared narratives of sacrifice. The labour market could not keep going without these images of attentive sacrificing women, and the families as ideal places for caring. So, by describing stories of sisters caring for siblings, of grandmothers attending to grandchildren, or of men becoming 'like women', this thesis has shown how these actors make sense of the contemporary reorganisation of the global labour market and depend on each other to survive within it. More generally, dynamics of care function to sustain ideas of solidarity at work and togetherness in transnational life.

Mobile care, moral practice

All analysis of transnational life involves an account of affect and emotions, particularly when the focus is on caring relations with individuals trying to sustain their togetherness, a ‘feeling of familyhood’ (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002), or a ‘sense of closeness’ (González-Fernández 2018), despite distance and absence. For the purpose of this study it was important to describe how individuals bridge different geographical points—and other kinds of social distance like class and gender—through their manifestations of love and mutual indebtedness. That is, what was in focus was the ‘pursuit of connection’ (Yeates-Doerr 2014), though this is not to neglect the different paths that individual lives can follow, as they ‘work with, through and away’ from their social relations (Tronto 2017:32). The intertwining of economic and material issues, love and things, became especially relevant to explain the sustainment of caring relations, and thus the notion of ‘intimate labour’ (Parreñas and Boris 2010) offered a frame for approaching this intermingling of moral and economic aspects of care. Commitment, attentiveness and sacrifice became key categories to explore understandings of care as moral practice. Care expands through its fragility and improvisation (Livingstone 2012), but is in constant risk of breaking up, since it is based on the faith that someone must be there.

The idea of the ‘mobility of care’ has suggested that care cannot exist in a static form but in movement, a dynamic that creates a circle of indebtedness and obligations. It has also been shown that this movement does not depend exclusively on people’s journeys, but on individuals’ strong commitments, shared ideals of what and how family and social life must look like, and corresponding narratives of sacrifice. Highlighting this understanding, this thesis has followed Livingstone’s approach to caregiving, as a ‘moral endeavour’ and a ‘social dynamic’ (2012), when individuals perform care in a world of limited resources. Thus, moral commitments take concrete forms through the performances of attentiveness, reproducing new generations of individuals while helping others in the final stage of their lives, but more generally concerned with day-to-day care across the life course. As a moral commitment and a productive force of social relations, it has been shown that care may be both ‘deeply personal, as well as deeply social’ (Livingstone 2012:96). The concrete

actions of caring arise from deep moral forces that are fundamental to social life and human existence. Yet, for migrants, as workers and as family members, these intensive emotional connections could not be sustained without every gift, loan, piece of clothing, pair of second-hand shoes, crucifix, furniture, or money, that circulate daily in social interaction. So, there is a dynamic dialogue between emotions and materialities that makes transnational life, and the world of caring, possible.

Attentiveness, or everyday performance of commitments, is central in women's lives, in sustaining family and social life, in co-presence and at a distance. Attentiveness, and the practices of *cuidar*, *ayudar*, *atender* (care for, help, attend to) are well developed within the context of family relations in Ecuadorian society and as such are transformed into a resource that Ecuadorians travel with. This resource is put to use in the daily routines of work as well as transnationally. As seen in Chapter 2, attentiveness as a source of sociality became useful for women in finding work in Spain, to access assets and incomes that sustain their families, and through such resources even supporting a debilitating welfare state that neither provides sufficient care for people in need—elderly, children and sick—nor for locals or foreigners. In Spain, Ecuadorian women came to fill the role of an added family member, 'the one who cares'. Following this, care should be read not only as affect transmitted to others, binding people together, but also as a world in which new social and economic relations are created, and ideals of 'employable' workers, and 'loyal' family members who 'must be there', become renewed.

Attentiveness is a resource for love, connections and life compensations, and must be seen in coexistence with different forms of inequality. The worst inequality that women suffer seems not to be within their families, in which they find other female counterparts to share their burdens, worries and laughter, and sometimes 'a man who becomes like a woman'. Rather, inequalities that affect women's lives are mainly related to how the economy is organised, leading to forms of sacrifice while reducing time that can be spent with loved ones. Moreover, the market does not provide the income and freedom that it perhaps once promised. Increasingly, this kind of economy leaves women—and men—caught in precarious jobs and life conditions, in which they struggle to construct dignity and social recognition. While promising free liberated individuals, the market has provided only the dream of it, because in reality, in Spain or in Ecuador, men and

women have come to an understanding that living interdependently is the only way to make a living and survive. This may require a critical analysis of the question of interdependence, of how we should pose questions in order to not get entrapped in a new false dichotomy between autonomy and dependence in reading human lives. This is a relevant issue in which the ethics of care has made an enormous contribution.

Following mobile care, we have seen in these chapters that expanding social networks is a way to make a living, since affect binds people together by providing life alternatives. The significance of social networks has brought the analysis toward a wider conception of care, a concept that had earlier been frequently confined to analysis of care labour alone. For this study, what I identify as the expansive character of care referred to the varied ways in which individuals provide and receive care, like work itself (Parreñas 2012), remittances and ‘sending dollars’ (McKay 2007), gifts (Liebelt 2015), time to talk, cooking a meal, taking someone to the doctor, the promise or the construction of a house, or ‘house-making’ (Dalakoglou 2010). Migration itself was identified as a form of care since it is a means of provision, but also because migration requires a sacrifice for others, something that demands great effort and that sometimes does not compensate enough. From this perspective, care becomes more dynamic and the concept more comprehensive. Consequently, it is more difficult to capture and to delimit. The idea of care as expansion draws attention to how individuals are amply creative and diligent in finding new expressions of or giving new meaning to their moral practices of care.

The complexity of the social networks, where friends and neighbours participate in caring relations, offered another perspective. I also highlighted the presence of an older daughter and the important role of grandmothers, intergenerational relations as well as cross-class and gender relations. This study has been mainly constructed from a women’s perspective, asking how female informants experience migration and the reorganisation of care. Nevertheless, it has also listened to the voices of men, children and youth about caring for and being cared for, coming to understand that all of them were involved in relations of mutual dependence, though sometimes neglected. This study provides an understanding of Ecuadorian lives in their transnational form, and in general, how caring relations are shaped in the interaction with cultural expectations and the intimate exigencies of the global economy.

Reconfigurations of transnational care

The discussion of the different aspects of care throughout the chapters has broadened the picture of how care and family are being reconfigured. Transnationally, care continues to be organised in a female world, among mothers, daughters and grandmothers, even female friends and domestic servants. But men increasingly have no other choice than follow this path, becoming 'like a woman', showing that gender boundaries and, more generally, the distance between the idealised roles and concrete persons in those roles, are also mobile. These transformations are welcomed and contribute to avoiding many ruptures within families. Life, however, also leads to conflicts when gender order and social norms remain firm and immovable in daily life, something that can happen both in proximity and at a distance.

As observed in this thesis, in the global care chain theory, men were absent. When women speak of their workplaces as being like a family, this is mostly related to the mother-daughter-grandmother relationship, with intensive solidarities manifested in the support of the elderly, the sick and children, or the maintenance of the house. Female solidarity and mother-daughter-grandmother relationships are at the basis of the infrastructure of care. However, in following Ecuadorian families along their care chains we come to observe that men also have to assume care responsibilities, a male care that is fragile, temporary, fleeting. A 'missing link' becomes incorporated into the care chain.

Other transformations oriented toward the emphasis on betterment (*superación*) and education raise new worries about who will care in the future for the elderly, the children and the sick. This question was the focus of the last chapter, with the struggles of parents and children to form committed individuals who hopefully will still care for older and new generations in the future. This is not clearly expressed among families. Parents and grandparents say they do not want to become a burden, they do not expect anything, but how then will they survive the poverty and dependence that age and sickness may bring? This is still an open question for these families, as well as for governments in rich and poor countries. How will people manage when they depend on others, when pensions are limited or non-existent, and health care or nursing homes are not available for everybody?

The intergenerational engendered narrative of caring and improvement, or *superación*, allows us to see care as both risk and hope. There is of course hope that family members will have better life possibilities; hope that one will care and that one can provide care better. Yet *superación* put family members at risk of forgetting their ties and abandoning their elderly, those left behind. While the anxieties brought by transformations of younger generations reveal a crisis regarding the future of care, ideals of *superación* surely provide hope for migrant families, such as young adults being able to complete a degree or find a good source of income, or more concretely, migrants being able to construct a house that will be the material base for the family, an asset that aims to diminish the uncertainty of the future.

In conclusion, the topics developed in these chapters explore questions about the ties created around the shared care for children, the sick and the elderly in the context of a general vacuum that women have left behind. The daily exchanges of money, favours and gifts appear as critical means of showing affect and become a crucial resource for sociality and for the permanent restoration of the moral duty of 'being part of the family' and of 'being connected'. The mobility of care, as described in this thesis, has shown different faces of care: as a set of social relations, as a space of powerful commitments of mutual support and solidarities, and as a conflictual terrain in which social inequality is manifested, not only in global terms, but also in labour relations, within families, and across generations.

SAMMANFATTNING PÅ SVENSKA

Omsorgens mobilitet⁸⁵

Ecuadorianska familjer och transnationellt liv mellan Ecuador och Spanien

Den här avhandlingen fokuserar på omsorgens dynamik i det transnationella livet hos kvinnor som migrerat från Ecuador till Spanien. Det handlar om de olika former av omsorg som produceras och upprätthålls på arbetsplatsen, bland vänner och mellan familjemedlemmar i båda länderna. I slutändan belyser avhandlingen hur omsorg mobiliseras för att levandegöra idealet om solidaritet på jobbet och om samhörighet och gemenskap i det transnationella livet. Avhandlingen är uppbyggd med den ekonomiska och politiska krisen i Ecuador i slutet av 1990-talet och början av 2000-talet som bakgrund, en kris som resulterade inte bara i dollariseringen av ekonomin och avsättandet av landets president, utan också i en dramatisk förskjutning från den tidigare traditionella manliga migrationen från södra Anderna till USA, till en ny våg av kvinnlig migration, främst från medelklassen, till Västeuropa och då särskilt Spanien. Kvinnor från hela landet lämnade sina barn, makar och äldre föräldrar bakom sig för att arbeta främst inom hushåll, vård och omsorg utomlands. I Ecuador störde detta den dominerande kulturella föreställningen om den förenade familjen under samma tak, centrerad kring närvaron av kvinnan som mor och hustru. Avhandlingen diskuterar kvinnors dilemma i att ge och få omsorg under många års frånvaro, de roller som familjemedlemmarna, vännerna och hushållsarbetarna spelar i denna process, och utvecklingen av långsiktiga motiv fokuserade på överföringar av pengar, återförening, återvändande och det slutliga målet att skapa en bättre framtid. Samtidigt som denna studie utmanar olika dikotomier mellan kärlek och pengar, hem och arbete, gåva och

⁸⁵ Det finns inte riktigt en exakt översättning till svenska av ordet *care* på engelska. Det närmaste är *omsorg* som jag använder här, trots att ordet i svenskan oftast används i yrkesmässiga sammanhang, inte minst av institutioner och myndigheter, och mer sällan associeras till personliga känslomässiga relationer i vardagslivet.

handelsvara -vilket ofta har strukturerat akademiska diskussioner om feminisering av internationell migration- belyser avhandlingen det intima förhållandet mellan kvinnors deltagande i gåvoekonomin och i den globala arbetsmarknaden genom linsen av omsorgsrelationer.

I sin mest enkla beskrivning innebär omsorg de konkreta handlingar som är involverade i känslomässigt och fysiskt omhändertagande, men omsorg har också i allt högre grad blivit en handelsvara som ges från omsorgsgivare till omsorgstagare. 'Omsorgens mobilitet' antyder dock behovet av att omformulera begreppet omsorg till att beteckna en dynamisk process som i flera riktningar binder människor samman över tid och plats. För att förstå hur omsorg mobiliseras uppmärksammar denna studie dess väsentlighet och dess förmåga till rörelse, att återskapa och omvandla familjerelationer och sociala livet, att reproducera solidaritet och underordning på samma gång. Ett djupt engagemang för stöd (*compromiso*), praktisk och vardaglig omhändertagande av andra (*atenciones*) och till och med berättelser om uppoffring (*sacrificios*) för familjens skull blir avgörande för att upprätthålla band över tid och distans. Som sådan, mer än en vara, bör den 'mobila omsorgen' förstås som en värld av sociala relationer där människor aktivt engagerar sig genom den pågående cirkulationen av pengar, favörer och gåvor eller genom att sätta sig själv i tjänst för andra, vilket i sin tur skapar intimitet och ömsesidig skuldsättning. När hela det statliga systemet för socialt skydd och välfärd är obefintligt eller för svagt för att tillgodose människors behov, är möjligheten att mobilisera omsorg genom moraliska principer ofta det enda sättet att tillfredsställa individernas behov.

APPENDIX

Short portraits of the main participants in this study

Aracely

Aracely was a 47-year-old widow, and she had been living in Barcelona for twelve years when I first met her. She shared a comfortable apartment downtown with her daughter (18 years old), her eldest son (around 24), this son's wife and their two small children. Her younger sister and her friend Grace, who both lived in Barcelona, regularly visited her. This sister was married to a Catalan man and had small children. Aracely had left a younger son in Ecuador who lived with his maternal grandparents in Las Palmas. This son was eight years old when Aracely moved to Spain.

In Barcelona Aracely lived in the same building where she worked as a carer of an elderly man at his home on another floor. Her responsibilities were assisting him with his necessities at bedtime and staying with him for the whole night. She got him ready for bed, reminding him to brush his teeth, change to pyjamas, and made sure he took his medicines. She also helped him get up the next morning. The most important duty was the daily routine of accompanying and listening to him. She left in the morning after the man had eaten his breakfast but kept her phone close by in case he called and needed someone to talk to during her off-hours. Due to this kind of work that kept her half-awake during the nights and consequently obliged her to sleep during the day, she said she hated being in the kitchen the whole day and went out daily to a cafeteria close by accompanied by someone who was available at the moment, usually a friend or a family member.

Marta

Marta, 45 years old, originally a schoolteacher in her town Las Palmas, was married to Antonio, 50 years old. Together, they had six children aged three to 15 when she left. Only her oldest son had moved to Barcelona. Marta and Antonio had been living in Barcelona for 10 years. She worked as a cleaner when her contacts called her, but mostly, she worked as a domestic helper for different middle-class families, which provided her with better income compared to other migrants at the time. When Marta first arrived, she worked for the same employer-family for long periods and she remembers that at that time, jobs were abundant. Marta did not have a stable job, but she always found something to do. During her unemployment periods, which she took advantage of to take her trips to Ecuador, the family lived on their savings and Antonio's income. Antonio, after many short-lived jobs in the construction industry and periods of unemployment, eventually found a job as a security guard in a museum of the city. This made it difficult for him to visit his children but the household's economy improved.

In Ecuador, Marta's and Antonio's five children had been left in the care of the eldest daughter Alexandra, aged 13 at the time of the mother's migration. The children shared their family house with their maternal grandfather. For a while, they got help from an *empleada*, and later for a short period, an aunt moved in with her partner. Later on, the children moved to another aunt's home, Antonio's sister, in the coastal province of Manabí. All of them were living in Las Palmas again when I met Marta.

Gloria

Gloria is married to Pepe and they were 55 and 58 years old respectively when I met them. They had been living in Barcelona for seven to eight years. They both were active members of the local evangelical church. Gloria and Pepe worked initially at the metro and for the commuting trains (*tren de cercanías*) respectively. Both stood in different stations during the day providing information for passengers. When they got fired, at different times, they searched for jobs as carers for the sick and the elderly, since they had done this before. Pepe was often trying to start his own business but lacked

resources, and eventually he found a temporary job as a janitor while Gloria attended a sick woman on Saturdays, a job she said was mostly about encouraging the woman to get out of her depression. This included listening, giving advice, brushing her hair, selecting an outfit and convincing her to have a social life. Gloria and Pepe only accepted the care jobs as a last resort, and as a supplement to their income. Later on they both attended training classes in geriatric care in order to get more specialised jobs that according to them did not include lifting the patients, which they perceived as very difficult and risky at their age.

Pepe and Gloria had left their four children in Paraíso, Ecuador: Lucy, Jimmy, Ruth and another teenage son who had passed away tragically while the parents were living in Barcelona. The eldest daughter Lucy was married and had moved to a different province (Manabí) but came back to Paraíso during my fieldwork. She had two small children. Jimmy, Ruth and the other brother had been left in charge of their grandmother Anita and Karen, Gloria's daughter with an earlier partner. Karen also had two children. All of them lived in the same town at the time of my fieldwork.

Lupe

Lupe was around 49 years old when I met her in Via Bella. She had moved to Barcelona together with her partner who was not the father of her two left-behind children aged 16 and 20 at that time. Lupe and her partner had been living in Barcelona for 10 years. They occupied a room in a shared apartment with other migrants from Ecuador and one from Peru. Lupe was born in the province of Manabí but had been working in Guayaquil before migration. She had graduated at the nursing school, and when we met, she was working as a nurse in the local hospital. The activities of the team of professional nurses, which Lupe was part of, included the maintenance and management of the laboratories, but she also assisted patients by taking vital signals, blood pressure, weight and so on. She did this mostly with hospitalised patients. Before this job she had worked as a personal assistant for the elderly. When she had time, she still went to clean the house of her boss and friend, a doctor at the hospital. Additionally, she was looking to move to another apartment in order to have her own place and to sub-rent the rooms to make an extra income.

Her two children had been left in Ecuador in the coastal province of Manabí. When I met Lupe, her children were living on their own without any other relative looking after them. As Lupe told me, her desire was to reunite with her daughter in Barcelona, a plan that did not happen during the course of my fieldwork. Lupe wanted her son to start a business on his own. I tried contacting Lupe's children in Manta (Manabí, Ecuador) during my fieldwork period but they were never available.

Mayra

Mayra was 33 years old when I met her. She had been living in Barcelona for around eight years. She lived with her husband on a street in Via Bella. They had a two-year-old child at the time we met. They shared a three-bedroom apartment with Mayra's two sisters aged 26 and 29. Mayra was an accountant (bookkeeper) with work experience in Ecuador and Colombia where she had met her partner. In Barcelona she worked as a cleaner at different offices, one of them being at a conference centre from six to ten in the morning, which made it difficult to leave her son at kindergarten. She described her cleaning job as very heavy since it included vacuum cleaning, washing toilets, picking up immense mountains of garbage or even vomit that people had left after an event. She also worked temporarily in the afternoons, as a cashier at a local grocery shop and cleaned a *locutorio* in her barrio. She also coordinated a group of Yanbal direct sales and searched for new clients constantly. During the summer she travelled with a Catalan family to their summerhouse and took care of their children and their house. Mayra said that this was a nice relaxing job, since she could live there with her child during the season. When she had time, she took some English courses offered by the city hall.

In Ecuador, her parents and five younger siblings expected support for education and health expenses. She also felt it was her responsibility to send them clothes, shoes and other accessories for daily life.

Celia

Celia was 45 years old when I met her at one of Mayra's Yanbal meetings. She was married to Juan, who had stayed in Ecuador in their

town of La Victoria. Celia's son had reunited with her in Barcelona and they had been living there for seven years. She shared an apartment with this son, her daughter-in-law, her grandchild, and a tenant who rented a room in the apartment, which provided an extra income for the young couple. Originally, Celia owned a beauty parlour in La Victoria and had many apprentices. She identified herself as a *maestra de belleza*, hairdresser expert. In Barcelona, Celia had been working at different nursing homes for the elderly but was unemployed when I met her. Her main income was unemployment benefit. At the nursing homes she had helped the elderly at mealtimes, but mostly, she cleaned and made beds. She told me that making beds required her to work quickly and left her with no time to take breaks. When unemployed, she went around offering pedicures, manicures, and hair styling at cheap prices. She also tried to sell Yanbal products.

When Celia left Ecuador, her daughter Jazmin was 13 years old. When I met Jazmin, she was almost 20 and was studying to be a tourist guide. Jazmin had been left with her father, Juan, Gloria's husband. Jazmin and Juan lived close to her grandmother in La Victoria. Jazmin studied in Guayaquil where she lived with an aunt from Monday to Friday. During the weekends she was in La Victoria or travelling around tourist attractions in coastal Ecuador with friends.

Emperatriz

Emperatriz, in her mid-sixties and divorced, had been living in Barcelona for ten years when I met her. Her former husband and father of all her children stayed in Ecuador and lived with their daughter, Doctor Mireya, in Las Palmas. Emperatriz worked as a seamstress at her own workshop in Via Bella together with her friend Lola, of a similar age. The atelier was open to passing clients who needed to repair their clothes. Emperatriz's earnings from the atelier did not provide enough so she often looked after a sick woman, and she also found 'some hours' of work as a cleaner through her contacts. She also regularly helped her son and his family to watch her little grandchild in another part of Barcelona. During her absence Lola stayed at the workshop. Lola was her most important business partner, and received payments in the form of a little room that Emperatriz had made available to Lola in her shared apartment. Emperatriz had many other adult children in Las Palmas and generally her family was well off. She said she had mostly migrated to see if there was some money

to make, but also because she wanted to separate from her former husband who remained at her house in Las Palmas. Though she recognised that her family left behind did not need economic support, she frequently sent gifts for her children and grandchildren, and worried about her unemployed youngest son who had a little baby with cerebral palsy who needed expensive therapies. Emperatriz tried to send clothes and bedclothes to help this son start his own business.

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This thesis focuses on the dynamics of care in the transnational lives of Ecuadorian migrant women in Spain. It is concerned with the various forms of care that take shape and are sustained in the workplace, between friends, and among family members in Ecuador and Spain. Ultimately, it sheds light on how care is mobilised to sustain ideals of solidarity at work as well as togetherness in transnational life. The thesis is set against the background of the economic and political crisis in Ecuador of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which resulted in a wave of female migration to Western Europe, especially Spain. Women left their children, spouses and elderly parents behind to work in domestic and care jobs abroad. In light of this, the thesis engages with women's dilemmas in giving and receiving care during years of absence, the role of family members, friends and domestic workers in this process, and the development of long-term goals focused on remittances, reunification, return, and the ultimate goal of creating a better future. Most generally, while challenging a series of dichotomies between love and money, home and work, gift and commodity, the thesis describes the intimate relationship between women's participation in the gift economy and a global labour market through the lens of care relationships.



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