Networks of Opportunity and Obligation: Ecuadorian Migrant Domestic Workers and Their Transnational Families

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ABSTRACT

Hundreds of thousands of Ecuadorian women have migrated to Spain over the past two decades, seeking jobs as domestic workers. The gendered nature of this migration and its impact on families is the focus of my research. Migration is a family survival strategy within a global system that undervalues domestic work and fails to meet the needs of women and their families worldwide. While remittances aid in the development of home communities, a perspective that sees remittances as a development strategy ignores the real sacrifices and struggles of migrant women and their families. Using participant observation and interviews in both the home sending community in Ecuador and in Madrid, I explore the impacts on both the sending family and the daughters in Spain.

By studying the same transnational family over time and across borders, I explore family dynamics through the details of the actual migration experience: how migrants learn the cultural codes to pass through immigration, how they raise capital through social networks to finance the trip, and how migrants negotiate housing, finding work and gaining legal rights in Madrid. I discuss the undervaluing of care work, which increases the vulnerability of Ecuadorian migrant women. I also investigate the dynamics of this transnational family, through communicative practices, return visits and family reunification. Finally I consider how the migration project of Ecuadorian women affects their sense of personal development and identity. Looking toward the future, I discuss how opportunities are diminishing for migrant workers as the Spanish economic crisis deepens, forcing migrants to decide whether to stay in Spain or return to Ecuador.
CHAPTER ONE

AN INTRODUCTION

COMPADRAZGO AND THE FIRST TRANSNATIONAL NETWORK

In 1979, when my mother was twenty-two and had recently graduated from Oberlin College, she signed up for Peace Corps. She had never been to Latin America before. My mother is a white woman, the daughter of a preacher and a schoolteacher from Georgia. Although she had been a history major, Peace Corps trained her in “agricultural development”, teaching her farming techniques that they expected her to relay to the residents of the village where they would send her. After training in Costa Rica, she was stationed in a rural village in Tungurahua Province, Ecuador\(^1\). For two years she lived in the village, working as an extension agent for the Ministry of Agriculture. She worked with farmers to improve crop production techniques, experimented with new high value crops and encouraged better management of dairy cows (vaccinations, introducing salt in cows’ diets, etc). She also started a “Women’s Group” that sewed and baked together (often using her own recipes for traditional German Christmas cookies, substituting in Ecuadorian ingredients). During her two years in Ecuador she became a familiar face in the village, well known and well liked. By the time she left in 1981, she had been asked to be the *madrina* [godmother] for several children, including a baby girl named Pilar.

Over the past thirty-five years she has maintained close relationships with several families, including Pilar’s family. As Pilar grew up, she dutifully sent letters to her *madrina* each year. Though my mother moved several times from when she returned to Atlanta after Peace Corps until she settled down in Upstate New York, she and Pilar were always in contact.

\(^1\) Refer to Appendix A for a map.
Occasionally Pilar’s parents would go to the nearest city to see if the madrina had sent a letter with a twenty-dollar bill tucked inside. Because of the routine letters over the years, Pilar was the only godchild who remained close to my mother.

For this reason, she knew when Pilar emigrated from Ecuador to Spain in 2002 because Pilar would call my mother every few months from telephone cabinas in Madrid. In fact, when my family visited Ecuador in 2005, when I was twelve years old, my mother had already seen Pilar, and her sister, Isabel, in Madrid. Both women has migrated to Spain to labor as domestic workers in the homes of Spanish families, sending back their earnings to support their family in Ecuador.

Before my mother decided to visit Ecuador in 2005, she had maintained contact with only three families, through infrequent letters and four visits over 25 years. She had lost direct contact with most families since they did not have phones in their homes and mail service was slow and unreliable. In August of 2005, bringing her two adolescent children (me and my brother, then fourteen) and her non-Spanish speaking, uneasy-traveling husband, my mother went to reconnect with the families and to visit the village. This would be my first introduction to Ecuador, to Pilar’s family and to what it meant to be part of a transnational network created and sustained by relationships of compadrazgo between godparents, godchildren and their families. I did not know it at the time, but that visit revitalized my mother’s connection with Pilar’s family and sowed the seeds for my own relationship as well.

When we visited in 2005 we arrived without advance warning because we did not have anyone’s phone numbers. To get to the village my mother decided to hire a taxi to drive us from Quito, the capital of Ecuador, because she wasn’t sure that she would remember the way transferring from bus to bus. On subsequent journeys we would take the bus from Quito,
disembarking on the side of a highway and waiting for a *camioneta* heading to the cantón [county seat]. We would ride in the back of the *camioneta* up the twisting hills and steep curves of the mountains. When we reached the cantón we would walk through the town center until we found the street where all the *camionetas* waited to take passengers to the small villages higher up in the mountains. Everyone stared at us, four over-sized *extranjeros* [foreigners] with too much luggage. My mother, a six-foot blonde-turned-grey, laughed because the *camionetas* waited outside the front door of her favorite *panadería* [bakery], whose pastries she claimed made her gain fifteen pounds while in Peace Corps. When we arranged a *camioneta* to take us up the mountain, the driver immediately recognized my mother as *Señorita Elena* and asked her if she had really returned “¡de los años, pues! [After so many years]”. We stayed for a weekend, reunited with the families my mother had lived with, and then returned a week later with some advanced notice.

Since then, the bond between *madrina* and *ahijada* [goddaughter] has expanded to include the entire family. Pilar’s family is quite large and I have never met most of the extended family. Don Tomás, Pilar’s father, is in his late 60s and Doña Carmen, her mother, is in her late 50s, like my own parents. In fact, on our first family visit in 2005 my mother discovered that she and Doña Carmen were both the same age and my father and Don Tomás were also the same age. They celebrated a joint birthday dinner – complete with *cuy* [guinea pig] and cake. She had thought Doña Carmen was much older since she already had several children when my mother was stationed in the village.

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2 A *camioneta* is a small pick-up truck that acts like a taxi. Everyone rides in the back and pays a small fee (typically between 30 cents and two dollars). *Camionetas* drive in one direction and to get off passengers knock on the back window of the cab to signal to the driver.
Don Tomás and Doña Carmen have six sons and daughters: four women and two men. Pilar and Isabel are in the middle of the age range. Pilar was born in 1980 and Isabel was born in 1981. The oldest daughter is over forty, the youngest is twenty-two. The oldest daughter, the oldest son and Isabel are the only siblings with children. The oldest daughter has four children, spanning the ages of 9 to 17. The oldest son has a daughter whom he supports financially but who lives with her mother. Isabel’s twelve-year-old daughter had just migrated to Spain to be with her mother when I conducted my fieldwork in 2012. For the most part, all of the siblings have stayed in the village, with the exception of Pilar and Isabel. One of the sons works in construction, which requires him to travel to Guayaquil (a port city in the south of Ecuador) for three weeks at a time. The other son works for the military and lives in Quito during the week, but maintains a bedroom in the family house and returns home every weekend.

After our first visit to Ecuador in 2005, I visited Pilar and Isabel in Spain almost every other year for the next six years. Two summers ago Pilar spent a month with my family in the U.S. after receiving her Spanish citizenship. It is difficult for an Ecuadorian to get a tourist visa to the United States, so when Pilar received her Spanish citizenship, my mother and Pilar decided that was the time for her to come visit us. Nervous that there might be problems in the airport with immigration control, my mother sent her a signed letter, written in English, with our phone number, address and names in case she was stopped. As her madrina, my mother also paid for her plane fare and all her living expenses while she was with us. Pilar is like an older, second daughter of our family.

The year after that, my family flew to Ecuador to attend her wedding and to celebrate the New Year together. Pilar and her husband (also Ecuadorian, from a neighboring town) both live in Madrid, but wanted to return to Ecuador to get married with their families present. As the
padrinos [godparents] my parents were featured in the wedding, kneeling before the priest with the new couple during the service, leading the toasts, and offering wedding favors to the guests. In a traditional Catholic wedding the padrinos are key members because their relationship links the new couple, the church, and solidifies social ties. Pilar wanted my mother, who was the madrina of her baptism, to also be the madrina for her wedding. Since she had gotten to know my father well when staying with us in the summer of 2011 and our whole families were linked, she wanted both my parents to be the padrinos at her wedding as an example of a strong marriage. Although neither of my parents is Catholic, the priest made an exception, allowing them to be present at the front of the altar with the new couple in what was a very traditional Catholic service. As North American (and white, in my mother’s case) padrinos, my parents gain a sort of celebrity status when we return to Ecuador. Exceptions are made and cultural norms loosened.

In Ecuador, like much of Latin America, entire families are connected by godparent-godchild relationships, called compadrazgo. It is a set of strategic relations that create webs of obligation and debt, while at the same time sustaining affectionate and emotional bonds. Madrinas and padrinos support their godchildren through baptism, first communion, weddings and their various financial projects. Everyone must have a godmother for a baptism, and typically families choose someone with higher status; specifically someone with more money. The relationship creates an opportunity for resource transfer and network connections from richer families to poorer families. Padrinos help their godchildren afford school supplies, find jobs, and pay for medical expenses. For example, Pilar once asked my mother to help her buy a sewing machine so that she could earn some money as a seamstress.
At heart, *compadrazgo* is a form of paternalism as well. It establishes networks of information and resource transfer across class lines. For this family, my mother was an interesting choice as a *madrina* because of her absence from the social lives of families in this village. As an outsider she would not be useful for internal exchanges like finding work or gaining admittance to a school or program. However, as an international connection, she became Pilar’s family’s first link into a transnational network, which would grow to include Spain as Pilar and Isabel migrated abroad.

More than just a resource transfer, relationships of *compadrazgo* also create emotional bonds between the godparents and godchildren. *Madrinas* give their godchildren advice and emotional support. They serve as mentors and advisors, making recommendations for the future of their *ahijados*. For example, when Pilar wanted to marry her husband she insisted that my mother meet him when she visited Spain, seeking her *madrina’s* seal of approval. Since her parents could not travel to Spain to meet him, my mother served as a partial substitute for that parental role. The affectionate bond of emotional support connects my family and Pilar’s. When I visited Ecuador alone, I was welcomed into my *compadres’* home because I am the daughter of the *madrina* and thus a *comadre* in my own right. Or, when my family lived in Italy in 2009, Pilar’s aunt, uncle and cousins, who live in Italy as migrant workers, were welcomed into our home because they are also, loosely, part of this web of *compadrazgo*.

When I came to Ecuador to study abroad in the fall of 2012 I planned to conduct this fieldwork, seeking to understand the dynamics of this transnational family and the way in which Pilar and Isabel’s migration to Spain had affected their family. I could see the changes in front of me (a new home, new shoes, a shower with hot water), but I wondered what my *compadres* had to say about the migration of their daughters and what it had meant for their family. When I first
arrived I had been slightly anxious that I would show up and the family would be busy with their potato harvest and tending the cows and unable to spend time with me. Without my mother and her connections as *madrina*, I feared that the distance between the family and myself would be too wide to ask permission to conduct interviews or to gather ethnographic field notes.

However, that was not the case. I spent one week with them before the semester started. Then, given my study abroad schedule in Quito, I visited on occasional weekends. Finally, I spent a week with them when my program ended, celebrating New Year’s together. Even without my mother, I was welcomed into their home. They treated me like a daughter, except with more formality. I was well cared for, and referred to somewhat deferentially as *Señorita Eleanora*.

Another important characteristic of *compadrazgo* involves *confianza*, or trust. When we visited Ecuador in 2005, the relationship was very formal. We arrived at the family home and were served an unbelievable amount of food. Although each of us was served an entire *cuy* (a formidable dish for a twelve-year-old girl on her way to becoming a vegetarian), we did not have to finish it all. An abundance of food, and serving each guest an entire *cuy*, is a sign of respect and *cariño* [affection]. The discovery that my parents were the same ages as Pilar’s parents, and now returning with children of their own, made the cultural and social distance shrink. They had become more similar than when my mother, a single, young, college-educated *gringa*, first arrived twenty-five years earlier.

Linguistically I have seen *confianza* used to encourage me to return to visit, to not be anxious about being a burden. “*¡Venga! Con confianza.*” However, I have also seen my mother use *confianza* to implore for more familiarity between the two families. When offered another bowl of soup, or the largest piece of the chicken, while in 2005 we would have quickly said,
“Yes, thank you. ¡Qué rico!”, now we have the confianza to say, “This is delicious. Thank you so much. I am very full, and cannot eat any more, but trust me (con confianza), your food is the best I’ve eaten in Ecuador.”

My relationship with Don Tomás and Doña Carmen is quite different from my relationship with Pilar and Isabel. Don Tomás and Doña Carmen treat me formally (calling me Señorita Eleanora, always serving me first), yet even this changed over the course of my fieldwork. Through several visits and spending extended time together, sharing food, stories and household tasks, our confianza grew. By the time I left Ecuador in late January of 2013, Doña Carmen would allow me (con confianza) to help her carry feed to the pigs or to wash the dishes, all with less fanfare and greater familiarity.

Of course, the general aura of formality is a part of relations in this village. Here, many people still use the form usted [you, formal] to refer to one another, including their children. Everyone refers to each other as Don and Doña [the honorable]. Only foreigners, high status residents, or schoolteachers are referred to as Señor or Señora. Over the course of my fieldwork, and my close relationships with two other families in the village, I grew to understand the class divisions within the village itself. Pilar’s family is part of the cooperativa, the indigenous land cooperative. Although Pilar’s family does not identify as indigenous, their last name has Kichwa (indigenous language) roots and their phenotype, as well as aesthetic presentation, indicates indigenous ancestry. They are very short and broad chested with dark skin. Don Tomás wears a traditional hat and Doña Carmen wears thick leggings under her knee length skirts and wraps her hair in long braids in a style typical to indigenous Ecuadorian populations. Their conversations are peppered with Kichwa terms, like guagua [child], ñañalo [brother/sister] and chuchaqui [drunk]. Within the indigenous, poorer part of the village, residents refer to each other with
greater formality and deference. The relations of formality between my family and Don Tomás and Doña Carmen are therefore not just due to compadrazgo or my status as a foreign, but also indicative of broader cultural norms in the village.

My relationships with Pilar and Isabel are less formal than my relationship with their parents. We treat each other more like sisters, with more familiarity and deeper intimacy. In part this is due to being closer in age and members of the same generation as daughters. We have also built confianza over years of more frequent visits and more time spent together. However, we are also more similar because of Pilar’s social standing as (what she calls) a “cosmopolitan” woman living in Madrid. During her decade living in Spain, Pilar has successfully completed a program to receive a high school diploma and nursing certification. Thus, when I approached her about doing this research, she and I discussed my research questions as fellow students. Unlike my relationship with her parents, Pilar and I are more equally situated as “cosmopolitan” women who live away from our parents, who study and who pursue professions.

With this understanding of the relationship between my mother and Pilar, myself and her parents (a transnational network in its own right), I turn to the networks of obligation and opportunity that were created, maintained and struggled against by Pilar and Isabel as Ecuadorian migrants in Spain. How did their migrations affect their families? In what ways did migration and transnational relationships shift family dynamics? What did this migration mean for Pilar and Isabel, as they became Pilar’s “cosmopolitan” women?

**PUSH AND PULL FACTORS OF ECUADOR TO SPAIN MIGRATION**

Ecuadorians have been migrating for a long time, both within the country and internationally. Economic factors have often forced rural migrants into the city to seek work or,
in more desperate situations, out of the country, like the migration waves to Argentina and
Venezuela in the 1950s and to the U.S. since the 1960s. Shifting economic, political and social
conditions in Spain and Ecuador led to an increased migration to Spain at the turn of the 21st
century. Push factors impelled migrants to leave Ecuador, while pull factors attracted them to
Spain, leading to a mass migration of over 400,000 people (Lagomarsino and Torre 2007).

Ecuador faced a suffering economy in the 1990s, due to the negative consequences of
neoliberal policies implemented in the 1980s. Neoliberal policies favored the ideology of
“market oriented” economies, which forced developing nations like Ecuador to invest in trade
and production in order to receive IMF loans. The structural adjustment that accompanied these
IMF loans had disastrous consequences for Ecuadorian families (Herrera 2008). Rather than
resulting in healthy economies, as neoliberal economists had promised, these policies meant a
concentration of wealth and an increase in social inequality. With the emphasis on privatization,
reduction of trade barriers, and deregulation, Ecuador faced greater inequality and
unemployment than ever before. In fact, according to a 1995 Survey of Life Conditions, the
richest 20 percent of households owned 91 percent of the land. In rural Ecuador 78 percent of the
total population was living in poverty. Throughout this process, Ecuador fell deeper into debt.
According to Ecuador’s Banco Central, by 1999 Ecuador was 13.8 billion dollars in debt
(Falconí-Benítez 2001).

Moreover, in 2000 the Ecuadorian government decided to dollarize the economy.
Facing economic crisis and the need to distract from his rising unpopularity, the president at the
time, Jamil Mahuad, proposed dollarization in January 2000. When he was deposed later that
month, his successor, Gustavo Noboa, ratified the dollarization. Dollarization did help stabilize
the economy over time, but in the short-term and medium-term, the exchange rate for conversion was very undervalued, leading to drops in real wages (Beckerman and Solimano 2002).

With high levels of unemployment, low salaries and a lack of social services, families found themselves with few options. Low social expenditure, bad health conditions and extreme poverty meant that families lacked the basic necessities for social reproduction (Herrera 2008:96). The effects of the structural adjustment policies of the 1980s and onwards fell the hardest on poor women. Across the globe women, are expected to provide food, care for children, budget family incomes and manage their families. When unemployment spikes, women are often the first to lose their jobs. While families may experience a loss in income, women are still expected to find ways to sustain their families. Seeking to provide for their families, Ecuadorian women had to devise creative strategies for survival, which often meant precarious work (Escobar 1999:175). Women found work in unstable, unsteady and underpaid sectors, like domestic work. Yet, as the economic crisis grew, even those jobs disappeared. Facing a lack of social services and carrying the burden of basic welfare on their shoulders, Ecuadorian families began to look to migration abroad as a strategy for survival (Herrera 2012:148).

This migration reflects changing expectations within Ecuadorian families due to the shifting economic situation. By the 1990s subsistence farming and caring for children was no longer enough to keep women at home. In fact, it is arguable that this had not been the case for over half a century. Ecuador’s 1964 land reform, which terminated semi-feudal labor relations, created minifundios, land plots for individual families. The minifundios (which only accounted for 13% of land) were too small to provide full employment and meant that families had to send some members to urban areas to seek work as wage laborers (Jokisch 1997:67). This included women, who migrated from rural to urban areas as domestic workers. Today, with the effects of
structural adjustment and globalization, the situation is even more difficult because unemployment is at an all time high. Now rural Ecuadorian women must migrate internationally to find work, entering the labor market as a family poverty reduction strategy (Herrera 2012:143).

At the end of the 20th century, industrial nations, like Spain, began to face a critical care crisis as Spanish families had increasing difficulty fulfilling their basic care needs. Like much of Southern Europe, Spain employs a familial welfare model in which care giving and domestic labor are seen as the responsibilities of individual families. Accordingly, despite the economic growth of the 1990s, the Spanish government invested very little in social services like childcare and elder care. Yet, in the increasingly competitive and global economy, Spanish families must seek double incomes and women are entering the workforce at greater rates. In addition, familial gender roles have not shifted to reflect the realities of women’s work outside the home (Harzig 2006, Herrera 2008). This means that Spanish women face the infamous “double shift” in which they are expected to contribute income to their families while still fulfilling all the domestic duties. Moreover, the age of the Spanish population has been rising and fertility rates dropping, leading to a poorly balanced demographic distribution in which there are more elderly people than young people to care for them. As a result of all these factors, Spanish families found themselves in desperate need of domestic support (Herrera 2008). As Arlie Hochschild and Barbara Ehrenreich outlined in Global Woman, “The ‘care deficit’ that has emerged in the wealthier countries as women enter the workforce pulls migrants from the Third World and postcommunist nations; poverty pushes them” (2003:8). With this high demand for domestic workers, Ecuadorian women found a prime market for wage labor in Spain.
Furthermore, Spain had a fairly friendly immigration regime in the 1990s, making it an appealing target for Ecuadorian migration. Unlike other industrialized nations (like the United States), the Spanish immigration regime allowed migrants to obtain work permits, offered the possibility of permanent residency and even the transfer of social security payments (Herrera 2008). Further, immigration policies practiced a “tacit tolerance” for Latin American immigration. This means that Spain’s immigration enforcement implicitly allowed the entrance of undocumented Latin Americans. The Spanish state recognized Spanish-speaking migrant women as ideal care workers, given the low cost of their services and the historical, cultural and linguistic ties between Spain and Latin America. In fact, in 1985 Spain passed “La Ley de Extranjería,” which required immigrants to have residency and a work permit in order to apply for citizenship, with the exception of immigrants from Latin American countries (Anderson 2000). Recognizing the demand for cheap migrant labor and the steady supply available in economically deprived Latin American countries, Spain exercised relatively open immigration policies (Ambrosini and Quierolo Palmas 2007). Combined with the “push factors” which encouraged emigration from Ecuador, these “pull factors” made Spain an especially appealing destination for migrants. The high demand for care workers combined with the relatively open immigration regime drove Ecuadorian women to migrate to Spain seeking jobs in the domestic sector. By the late 1990s a mass migration of Ecuadorian women to Spain was underway (Anderson 2000, Herrera 2002).

Migration and the remittances generated by migrant labor abroad serve as a survival strategy for Ecuadorian families. According to FOMIN, el Fondo Multilateral de Inversiones, remittances are the second highest source of foreign exchange after petroleum exports. In 2002, 

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3 See Herrera 2005:153
Ecuadorian migrants abroad sent home 1,432 million dollars in remittances⁴. These remittances allow families to meet basic health and educational needs, in order to counter the deficiencies of the state in guaranteeing the social reproduction of its citizens (Herrera 2012:154). Finally, Ecuadorian women send back more money in remittances than their male counterparts; they send to more people, more frequently, and for longer periods of time (Wucker 2004).

Just as the migration decision is rooted in the needs of the family, the migration project is a financial investment for the whole family. Migration is costly and requires the support of an entire family to be successful. The cost of a plane ticket, the tourist visa, the rent for an apartment, and the daily necessities of food are all incredible burdens for poor, rural families. In order to raise enough money, familial relations must be mobilized (including immediate and extended family, as well as godparents, neighbors, and friends). Further, when migrants arrive in Spain they need the help of social networks in order to find work and locate services, especially when looking for work in the private care sector (Anderson 2000). Thus, it is important to remember that the economic crisis is not the only reason that women migrate. Social and familial networks influence the decision to migrate, as networks pass along information, contacts and cultural ideals. As I will elaborate in the following chapters, migration is more than a rational, economic decision. It is culturally constituted and involves status, gender, and complex ideas of duty, responsibility, sacrifice and opportunity (Herrera 2002).

**SETTING THE SCENES: ECUADOR AND SPAIN**

My methodology involves ethnographic fieldwork with an Ecuadorian family and their two daughters in Spain. I draw on fieldwork I conducted in Tungurahua Province, Ecuador in 2012 and Madrid, Spain in 2013. My fieldwork involves participant observation and semi-

⁴ Figures from Banco Central, see Herrera 2005:153
structured interviews with an Ecuadorian migrant domestic worker, Pilar and her sister, Isabel in Spain, as well as with their parents, Don Tomás and Doña Carmen in a rural village in Ecuador.

During the summer, fall and winter of 2012, I spent several weeks with Don Tomás and Doña Carmen in Ecuador. They live in a small village in the highlands of Tungurahua Province, in a mountainous area three hours south of Quito. The village has a small community center, where residents can pay their bills, a local elementary school and a small store (the front room of someone’s house) with basic goods on the center road. Most villagers belong to extended families that farm small plots of land using traditional methods. Trees sometimes mark the divisions in land plots, but no one uses fences because neighbors all know which plot belongs to whom. Older generations, unemployed family members and children who are not in school work the land, while other family members seek jobs in the town center or the closest city during the day. The nearest town center is a seven-minute drive from the house where Doña Carmen, Don Tomás and several of the siblings live. To get there, villagers either walk down the mountain or pay 30 cents to climb into the back of a camioneta. Families must supplement their subsistence farming with external income from wage labor in order to survive.

Houses in the village vary by the wealth and status of each family. The smallest houses are one-room adobe structures. The houses of the wealthiest families are made out of wood and frequently have two floors and several rooms. The newest houses are made out of concrete, rising to two or three stories, looking gigantic next to their neighbors. These concrete giants are markers of the migrants who built them by sending money each month to invest in a house they hoped to someday call home (Chu 2010). Most houses have electricity while fewer have running water and none are heated. Even though many houses have gas stoves, most people still prefer to cook food over a wood fire. Don Tomás and Doña Carmen live in Pilar’s house, which she has
built from the remittances she sends home. It is one of the few houses to have heated water for showering.

As a participant observer in the village, I assisted with household activities like cooking, cutting yerba, carrying feed to the pigs, milking cows and helping the grandchildren with their homework. During visits I went on daytrips with the family to neighboring villages, as well as ran errands in the closest town center. I saw the local school, panadería, and the family’s farmland on the páramo. We harvested potatoes, tracked down the veterinarian to vaccinate their three cows and skinned cuy [guinea pig] to eat at New Year’s. When I was with the family on Sundays, I would participate in the family’s conversations with Pilar and Isabel, who were living in Spain, but never failed to call.

In May 2013, I spent a week living with Pilar, Isabel and Isabel’s daughter in Madrid, Spain. Their multinational neighborhood is located on the metro line that all members of the family use to get to work. Stores on every block advertise goods from Peru, Ecuador and Colombia. In the parks, groups of Ecuadorians gather to hold volleyball tournaments on the weekends, some bringing their guitars to play folk songs and dance. In their neighborhood there are several cabinas, stores that offer Internet access and international phone calls for low rates. Their cabina of choice, run by South Asians, has clocks on the walls that display the time in Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia; Morocco, Mauritania, and Guinea; Ukraine, Moldova and Romania; Thailand, Cambodia and Malaysia. This is a neighborhood full of migrants and set up to meet the needs of migrant workers.

As in Ecuador, I was a participant observer and I helped with the household tasks. The few times the three of us were able to spend time together were over meals in the evening, when Isabel would return home late from work. The apartment complex was clean, but very small.
Meant for one family, with three tiny bedrooms, they make it fit five people. Pilar and Isabel informed me that most migrants cram ten to fifteen strangers into one tiny apartment by using bunk beds and covering the floor with sleeping pads.

I ran errands around the neighborhood, helped to prepare food and to hang the laundry and assisted Isabel’s daughter with her homework each night. I also accompanied Pilar to her school where she received her GED and is now taking nurse-certification classes. She was in the middle of final exams, and while she took her test I wandered the neighborhood. I also met her employers in their home, where she has worked for over eight years. While the visit to her employer’s home was short, it gave me important context for understanding her narratives about domestic work and her relationship with her employers. I was able to explore their neighborhood and to see the size of their apartment. Pictures of the extended family covered the wall and one of her bosses talked about all the family they would have over for dinner that weekend (and for whom Pilar would cook). As we left the apartment building, we passed several domestic workers, in uniforms, quickly smoking cigarettes by the front door and readying themselves to go back to work.

During my time in Madrid, the two men in the family were not present. Pilar’s husband was in Ecuador for a three-month visit, staying with her parents and helping them farm. He had been unemployed but was receiving a disability pension and the trip was intended to see if a return migration might be possible. Isabel’s husband was also away, but in another part of Spain working a two-month seasonal fruit-picking job. With the economic crisis and high unemployment rates in Spain, Ecuadorian men have an especially hard time finding work. They typically work in construction, a sector that is now virtually non-existent due to the Spanish
economy. Under such pressures, families must employ creative strategies to generate income and to limit expenses if all family members wish to remain in Spain.

In the course of my research, I recorded four interviews: two with Don Tomás and Doña Carmen in Ecuador and two with the daughters in Madrid. Interviews were open-ended and loosely centered around several themes. In Madrid, I asked Pilar and Isabel about their motivations for immigration, their experiences as initial arrivals, the importance of social and familial networks, and the remittances they send back to Ecuador. They also talked about domestic work and their relationships with their employers. Finally, they reflected on personal growth and their plans for the next five years. In Ecuador, I asked the parents, Doña Carmen and Don Tomás, about how their daughters’ immigration had affected family dynamics and wellbeing. This included stories about financing the migration project and how remittances are sent, received and spent. Finally, they also spoke of the future they would like to see for their daughters and their family as a whole.

All interviews were conducted in Spanish, recorded, transcribed, and then translated to English. Interviews lasted between one and four hours, some spanning over several days. In Ecuador the interviews were conducted during household activities, like washing clothes, cooking dinner and climbing the monte to milk cows. In Madrid the interviews were conducted at the kitchen table, during spare moments either at night or on the weekend.

Finally, this project has been, from its inception, a collaborative effort. When I began this research in the spring of 2012, I immediately sought Pilar’s approval and feedback. Together we have written a personal autobiography for her and her family in Spanish. We are both fully aware that my thesis will be written in English and therefore inaccessible to the family, so they have all received CD copies of their interviews and typed up transcripts. Each person has been able to
review his or her interview and offer edits throughout the research process (like requests not to
disclose certain information, or ideas about further stories and topics they would like to see
included). I remain in frequent contact with my informants and respect their wishes in regards to
privacy. In this thesis some names of people and places have been changed.

The study of migration and domestic work is complicated and there are no easy or
obvious answers. As Bridget Anderson wrote, “This research is ‘messy’ … there are
contradictions and tensions in individual experience as well as theory. Domestic workers are as
influenced as anybody else by prevailing discourses on the public and private, domestic work,
immigration” (Anderson 2000:7). So too are migrant workers, as international migration is a
global phenomenon with profoundly personal consequences (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003,
Glick Schiller et al. 1995). Through the process of interviewing I have recognized that
autobiography is constructed in retrospect, with a perspective formed by today’s realities
(Waterson and Rylko-Bauer 2006). There are no objectively “true” facts about this family’s
experiences with migration. Attitudes and perspectives vary from person to person and from year
to year. By examining the narratives they construct about the migration project, I seek to
understand how families, as individuals and as kin, negotiate within the global systems and
structural forces that so heavily impact their lives.
CHAPTER TWO

MYRIAD MOTIVATIONS FOR MIGRATION

What leads someone to migrate, leaving behind her family, friends and the world she knows? It would be simplistic, and reductive, to say that Pilar and Isabel migrated solely due to economic crisis. Of course, their poor economic situation and high unemployment rates created structural pressures on the family and migration did serve as a family strategy for survival during economic crisis. However, their migration decisions involved more than rational economic calculation. The sisters’ choices to migrate were made under the weight of complex motivations, including the pressure of watching their family’s economic situation deteriorate, the experience of tensions in their workplaces, as well as fissures and ruptures in their personal relationships. Social and familial obligations influenced Pilar and Isabel’s decisions because powerful ideals of familial duty pressured them to migrate in order to support their family. Moreover, facing limited choices (both economically and socially), narrow opportunities for self-advancement and strained personal relationships, migration offered an open window of both escape and possibility for Pilar and Isabel. Migration was simultaneously a strategic act in the face of economic crisis and a deeply personal decision in hopes of better opportunities for work, education, and more fulfilling social relationships.

Isabel migrated in 2000 when she was only nineteen years old. She is the younger of the two sisters and was the first to migrate. When I asked Isabel why she had decided to leave, she answered that her migration had been for economic reasons, mainly to support her five-month-old daughter. She explained that she wanted to provide for her daughter, especially because the child’s father was absent.
She said:

Well, I immigrated to Spain to give my daughter a better future. I wanted to give her a better future because I wanted the best for her because there I was...without the support of the father of my daughter. I decided to come here to Spain so that my daughter wouldn’t lack anything.⁵

When asked about her motivations for migration, Pilar, the older sister and the second to migrate, also said that the decision was mainly economic. She did not have a job, needed to help provide for her family and saw migration as a way to financially support her family. She explained:

Well, my motivations for emigrating came from the economy primarily...I’ve worked since I was fourteen and I gave what I earned to my parents...then in 2002 I was unemployed.

While both Isabel and Pilar described financial motivations, these reasons were at the same time intrinsically social and familial. Isabel migrated to financially support her daughter and Pilar migrated to financially support her parents. Economic crisis combined with social obligation pushed Pilar and Isabel to migrate to Spain in order to financially provide for their family.

The social obligation that pressured them to migrate was generated from the same social networks that supported their migration projects. As the first in her family to immigrate, Isabel had a much weaker social network and faced more difficulties in completing the project than Pilar. Before she emigrated, she worked for a woman in Quito whose nephew planned to immigrate to Spain and stay with his aunt in Madrid. Isabel depended upon this family acquaintance for access to social networks in Spain. Because this acquaintance had an aunt who

⁵ All translations are my own.
lived in Madrid, Isabel then had the crucial social connection to someone who already “knew the ropes”.

Of course, Isabel also had to mobilize her social network in order to raise enough money to finance the migration project. Migration is a hugely expensive endeavor for individuals and families. The plane ticket alone can put an entire family in debt. In the case of undocumented migration from Ecuador to Spain, migrants must purchase a roundtrip ticket in order to convince customs officials that the migrant is actually a tourist. Then, families must pay la bolsa, a tourist visa of sorts, which costs about USD$1,500. Finally, immigrants pay for the costs of a “travel agency,” through which they can both book their tickets and receive instructions on how to behave in the airport. These “travel agencies” are quite different from the agencies that book vacations or plan itineraries for busy professionals. Rather, these agencies teach immigrants how to pass as tourists for their best shot at entering Spain without being deported. With the cost of a plane ticket, la bolsa, the “travel agency” and some money for initial arrival costs, the migration project could cost upwards of USD$2000 at the turn of the 20th century. In order to pay the money, migrants must accumulate enough economic capital through the strength of their social and familial networks. Isabel explained:

We decided to come here together. But I didn’t have enough money to pay the ticket. So between my father and my mother, we went to an agency to buy my ticket with a loan. We left the deed to my father’s land in the agency. My father also paid for the other boy, with his deed. He loaned him some money to come here. But he was an acquaintance of the woman I worked for, and she was an acquaintance of my father. 6

Since she did not know anyone in Spain, Isabel knew that she would rely on this acquaintance’s contacts in order to find work and housing. The weakness of her social network

6 For Isabel’s trip the family took out a loan by mortgaging their land. Later, when Pilar came to Spain, she used money Isabel had borrowed from a friend at 10% interest monthly.
and her reliance on one (distant) acquaintance made her very vulnerable. In the end, he
abandoned her at the airport in Madrid and continued to Valencia to stay with his sister. Isabel
lamented:

Supposedly he was going to come to Madrid with me and we were
going to stay with his aunt and cousins. In the end, he went to
Valencia where a sister or some other family member was
living…and so, I arrived here. His cousin took me to an apartment
where a lot of people lived. A very small apartment where there
were seventeen people, and the owner liked to take money from his
own compatriots…

She arrived to an overcrowded apartment, filled with recent migrants seeking work and
getting swindled by an Ecuadorian landlord. Only nineteen years old at the time, and without
friends or family, Isabel found it very difficult to adjust and to find work. For Isabel, the
weakness of her social network (and the betrayal of her travel companion) left her stranded with
an uncertain future during her initial years in Madrid. Although she had been able to raise
enough money through her family and to find a connection in Spain through a distant family
acquaintance, her social network was not dense enough to provide her much support once she
reached Spain.

Pilar, on the other hand, had a much stronger social network. In many ways, her
migration experience was smoother than Isabel’s because she could depend upon Isabel’s
support and her connections in Spain. In 2002, Pilar quit her job at a sewing shop in a city about
thirty minutes from the village due to the deterioration of her relationship with her coworkers.
She explained:

I was working in a factory here in Ecuador and my coworkers
treated me badly. Not the owners, but my own coworkers, perhaps
because of the envy of knowing that I was, little by little,
exceeding the two months I’d been there and that I could exceed in
comparison [to them]. And to see that there was so much envy,
well, you don’t feel very good in that work. It cost me a lot to go to work in that factory. Every Monday that I went to work I was crying and crying and for me that is not a life.

Pilar decided to quit and returned home that afternoon, realizing that she now had no job and no way to help support her family. Her mother immediately chastised her, distraught, asking, “Now how are you going to live?” Isabel had already been in Spain for over a year, working and sending home money. Pilar recollected:

In that moment I felt such anguish, desperate to work. Every Sunday in the house my sister, who was already in Spain, would call. And that Sunday I talked to her. She knew that I was working in that factory and so she asked me, ‘How is your job?’ I answered, ‘Look, I quit that job and today I am without work.’ So she, seriously, talking very seriously, told me ‘Look, I will offer to help you with the money for the ticket and for the expenses that you need to travel like a tourist.’

Initially Pilar didn’t take her seriously, thinking that Isabel was joking. She didn’t believe that her sister would actually send her the money. However, when Pilar spoke with Isabel the next week, she had already sent the money necessary for the trip. She said:

The next Thursday my sister talked with my parents and she asked if I had withdrawn the money. She had already sent the money that she had received from her friends (which they had loaned with a very high interest) so she could give me this money and I could come from Ecuador. That was about 500 dollars, and 500 dollars is a lot...for the flight, about 500 dollars, and the tourist investment, 1,500, so in total she sent me 2,000 dollars from Spain to Ecuador. Seeing that she sent me the money, well, I had to do it out of obligation.

Thus, Pilar found herself within a web of obligation and duty that required her to migrate to Spain and to work to repay her debt. Once she had received the money from her sister she had to find a way to pay it back. For Isabel, on the other hand, Pilar’s migration served to strengthen her social network in Spain. As we will later see, the two women often served as references for each other when seeking work and frequently worked for members of the same extended family.
Further, their familial connection served as a survival strategy in a foreign city, where they worked as isolated domestic workers. Live-in domestic workers are not allowed to leave their employers’ homes except once a week. Separated from other migrant workers and possible social connections, migrant domestic workers often experience severe isolation and loneliness. As the first family member in Spain, Isabel felt that social isolation quite acutely. Since the family acquaintance had abandoned her in Madrid, Isabel’s limited social network was already extremely weak before she even stepped out of the airport as a recent arrival. Pilar explained that her sister was very lonely, and gave her own account of the abandonment:

She [my sister] felt really bad, really lonely for the year she was there, which is what she told me. ‘I want you to come here so that we can both be here together because I am so lonely.’ She felt full of loneliness, because when she was young supposedly a friend (a friend she thought was a good friend) had said that he was there, with a place to live and work waiting for her there. So, she went [to Spain] trusting in that. In the end, well, there was nothing, her friend didn’t appear and there was no work or anything.

In many ways, familial networks are much stronger than other social connections. Isabel’s acquaintance abandoned her in Madrid with no warning. The weakness of their social tie is especially apparent given that his aunt lives in Quito. Quito is about three and half hours away from this village and social ties with individuals in Quito are relatively weak, unlike the strength and depth of social ties within the same village. Further, social networks between fellow migrants can be more than transitory; they can be downright abusive. In some cases, other migrants swindle recently arrived immigrants by charging high interest rates on loans, or overcharging rent for a tiny, overcrowded apartment.

Family, on the other hand, creates obligations, duties and ties that span years, decades and lifetimes. Isabel was able to migrate because her father took out loans on his land. Pilar, in return, received a loan from Isabel. Although Pilar had originally intended to stay in Ecuador and
was strongly set against migrating, she found herself indebted to her sister with obligation (both financial and emotional) that continues to this day.

Beyond financial and social motivations, Pilar and Isabel were also motivated by their view of migration as an opportunity to fulfill their personal goals, desires and aspirations. When I first asked Isabel why she had decided to immigrate, she immediately spoke about her wish for the wellbeing of her daughter. While these aspirations are intrinsically connected to the economic goals of her migration, she spoke of her migration project as primarily based on desire to see a ‘better future’ for her daughter. She imagined her migration as an opportunity to create something improved. Yet, as she unraveled her story, she explained that she got pregnant out of wedlock at the age of eighteen. When her boyfriend at the time (now her husband), learned that she was pregnant, he refused to support her. She said:

In that bakery in Quito...I met him [my husband] there and we became boyfriend and girlfriend and everything else...then there was the problem that we were dating and I got pregnant. When he found out that I was pregnant, he didn’t want anything to do with me. So I was pregnant and that’s when I thought about going to Spain. Because I didn’t have my husband’s support.

In fact, when Isabel left Ecuador for Spain, she didn’t tell anyone, especially not him. In Isabel’s case only her immediate family knew she was leaving. As a young, unwed mother, Isabel must have faced significant social stigma leaving behind her five-month-old baby. She explained:

No one knew. I think they figured it out at some point. No one in the house knew [extended family]. Not my uncles, my aunts, my cousins, nobody. Nobody, nobody, nobody knew. Not even the father of my daughter. Nobody. I decided to come and my siblings helped me to get here. It was very hard.

In migrating Isabel was seeking to provide for her daughter, but also to escape the pain of having an unsupportive boyfriend who abandoned her when he learned she was pregnant. While
she described her key motivation as a desire to provide for her daughter financially, her migration decision was also influenced by the deterioration of her relationship with her boyfriend.

Although Pilar described her decision to migrate as purely economic, like Isabel she also had more complex motivations. At the very end of a four-hour interview, when talking about how she met her current husband, Pilar indicated that she was encouraged to migrate because of heartbreak as well. She said:

When I left Ecuador, what also drove me to come here was something related to a love, the first love I had there. He ended it and for me it hurt very much. I went, hoping to forget about everything and when I left Ecuador I wasn’t thinking about houses or cars, I was going for love…and sometimes I say that after ten years my dream has come true. What I came for is here. I wanted to come to Spain, meet someone and be happy. I didn’t want houses or cars or anything. I didn’t want any of that. The only thing I wanted was to be able to help my parents and my siblings, economically. And to continue, to be happy. For me, happiness was what I was looking for in coming to Spain and to think that after my ten years here and that dreams come true, as I say sometimes, the shame of traveling and losing so many years to be able to be happy and meet someone who makes me so happy.

When she speaks about her migration experience, Pilar claims that she never thought about traveling. However, over the course of her personal narrative it is clear that her motivations may have manifested themselves in her hopes and her (actual) dreams. She remembered:

The week before my trip arrived, I was very distressed. I didn’t sleep. I only cried and hid from my parents because I didn’t want them to feel badly. Crying and crying the day of my trip arrived and I traveling thinking that I was not going to stay [in Spain]. Just the week before they had deported an airplane full of Ecuadorians from Spain. So I said, ‘Surely it will happen to me too.’ My idea of traveling was that I would go and not even arrive to Spain, but that I would be sent back to Ecuador. So I went with the feeling that I would return or not even arrive [because of immigration control]. So,
the day arrived and it was very difficult to say goodbye to my parents and it was a very cold goodbye and I just wanted to enter the airport, board the airplane and perhaps arrive to the immigration enforcement and have them send me back to Ecuador.

But for me, perhaps looking at things now, it was my good luck that this didn’t happen. The plane took off, which for me was a very beautiful experience because that was my first time taking off in a plane and at twenty two years old, I had dreamed of flying in an airplane and to be able to make this trip. I had dreamed many times of flying on the wing of an airplane. My dreams were telling (because I never had the hope of traveling). Perhaps it was more the sensation that my godmother was going to come visit [in Spain]. [Laughter]

So, yes, I never had the idea to travel. Because of this, sometimes I think that the dreams are something that intuits something about yourself. To know that I was in the airplane was like my dreams were coming true.

Their narratives about their motivations for migration are colored by years of living outside Ecuador, laboring as domestic workers, and constructing meaning about their migration project. Pilar sees her migration as perhaps a form of fate and destiny. She did not intend to migrate and was only obligated to do so when her sister sent her the money. Yet, she speaks of this migration as an opportunity to escape heartbreak, a bad work situation and limited life opportunities. For both Pilar and Isabel, their migration decisions involved dreams of personal advancement, independence and selfhood.

In both of their narratives, Pilar and Isabel consider migration an economic and familial decision, but also one rooted in their personal goals and personal relationships. In a machista culture with limited opportunities for women outside of childbirth and caring for the home, migration can offer a path of greater opportunity. As we will see in the next chapters, migration has offered Pilar and Isabel new positions of status in their family and community, but also come with deep social and personal costs.
CHAPTER THREE

NAVIGATING THE CITY: RECENT ARRIVALS AND THEIR SOCIAL NETWORKS

As seen in the previous chapter, Isabel and Pilar’s social and familial networks intimately influenced their decision to migrate and their ability to afford the trip. Their networks were also crucial for their settlement in Madrid. Migrants that travel alone, without contacts, are the most vulnerable because they arrive in Spain without the social networks necessary to help them find work. Those who utilize their informal social networks, like Pilar and Isabel, often fare better because they have contacts that can help them secure loans, locate housing, and find work opportunities (Anderson 2000). While both Isabel and Pilar used their informal networks in Ecuador and in Spain, the strength and density of their networks varied and thus their experiences as recent arrivals differed greatly.

When Isabel migrated in 2000 she had limited social contacts in Spain and weak relationships with those acquaintances. Her travel companion, who had left her in Madrid, was only a loose acquaintance. Aside from him, Isabel knew no one in Spain. Because she had a weak social network, she was especially vulnerable during her first year. Lacking crucial information about how much money she would need, where she could find housing, and how to get hired as a domestic worker, Isabel quickly ran out of money and struggled to find employment. She said:

I didn’t know the exchange rate. I was foolish, totally disoriented. I was afraid and I didn’t know where to go or with whom or what I had to do or anything. And I remember that...I don’t know how much money they charged me [at the apartment]...but the money the guide gave me for one or two months didn’t even last for fifteen days.
Alone, with her limited network, Isabel experienced an uncertain situation as a recent arrival and felt disoriented, confused and lonely. In fact, when I interviewed her father, Don Tomás, he remembered the difficulties she had described during her first year in Spain. He explained, “She had to search like…almost like a dog. They didn’t give her any food. When she arrived there it was very difficult for her.” Without a strong social network, Isabel’s first weeks in Spain were difficult and left her feeling vulnerable.

Quite the opposite, when Pilar migrated in 2002 she could rely on her relationship with her sister to provide her shelter and money during her initial settlement in Madrid. Before Pilar had even left Ecuador, her sister had already loaned her money, and had shared with Pilar all the information she would need to have a successful trip. While the travel agencies described in Chapter Two taught the sisters how to pass through immigration control, their social networks taught them how to survive in the city. Like any migrant who leaves behind the familiarity of home for the great unknown of another city or country, Pilar felt anxious and afraid. However, even though Pilar felt disillusioned and culturally disoriented, with Isabel aiding her migration she never lacked food or money. When Pilar arrived in Madrid her sister installed her in the same apartment where Isabel had lived her first weeks in Spain. Much to Pilar’s displeasure, the apartment was small and crowded. She explained:

My sister was there [at the airport] with two women who lived in the apartment. They had a car and they took me to the apartment where my sister spent her Sundays and Thursdays, but in the living room. But when she had talked to me she had said that she had an apartment. So I had the idea in my head that she had an apartment like this [gestures to the room we are sitting in] and that she lived there alone. So of course, I had said that was fine. My disappointment was that, when I arrived at the apartment, in the doorway, there were about four drunks. Ecuadorians, but they were drunk…I saw a man with long hair in a bun and without a shirt. This was something I rarely even saw my brother do and on top of that he was also drunk. Now I wanted to turn and run away. People
left every day, but at the end of the week we were about ten to fifteen people in one small apartment, very small.

She slept in a small room with a couple and their child, in the heat of the spring. Isabel had to return to her employers’ home that very night, but left Pilar with enough money for the week. She had already found Pilar employment with the cousin of her boss, but the other maid was not leaving until the end of the month. Even with her sister’s relationship to support her, Pilar described her first week as awful. She said:

It was horrible. Then Sunday arrived and my sister had to go to work because she worked Sunday nights. She left me there with 300 Euros for food or whatever I needed... Within hours I was alone, with strangers. Despite being Ecuadorians, they were strangers to me. It was horrible... when my sister called me I was like a little child: ‘When are you coming back? I want you to come back. I can’t be here alone.’ And my poor, desperate sister, ‘Don’t worry, I’ll be back Thursday.’ And she had left me 300 Euros and I had the return ticket and the fifteen days were passing by. She told me that she had work for me and that was true and she had work for me in the building where she worked. My work was with the cousin of her boss... Thursday arrived and I was happy because she took me on a walk. But I was crying because I didn’t want to sleep there [in the apartment] and I wanted to go with her [when she returned to her employers’ house].

Although she was living with other Ecuadorians, they were “strangers” as Pilar described. Just because they were fellow migrants did not mean that Pilar felt familiarity or comfortable with them. Social networks can be layered with discomfort, insecurity and even exploitative relationships. As Isabel described in Chapter Two, the landlord of the apartment “took money from his own compatriots.” While the aunt of Isabel’s acquaintance was generous and helped her find work, the landlord was thrifty and overcharged recent arrivals. Moreover, when Pilar described her feeling of shock when she saw shirtless men drinking beer in the apartment, clearly it did not matter that they were Ecuadorians, fellow migrants in Madrid, because their behavior
was still just as foreign. Networks involve familiarity, accountability and trust, which are all relationships that must be built. Weak social networks can be not only unsupportive, but also manipulative. For example, Isabel’s acquaintance who abandoned her in Madrid was a deceptive contact because he told her he was going to Madrid, but instead went to Valencia. Yet, it was through his cousin and his aunt that Isabel found housing and, eventually, employment. Thus, social networks are complicated because they are comprised of relationships of generosity and honesty alongside manipulative and deceptive relationships in which migrants can take advantage of naïve and recently arrived fellow migrants.

The uncertainty and depression that Pilar felt as a recent arrival, alone in that crowded apartment full of strangers, made her want to return home. After she saw her sister on Isabel’s Thursday afternoon off, she decided to endure the weeks and wait until she could start work. She recalled:

That was my decision. I had to wait another fifteen days to be able to go to work and I was alone again. But I didn’t get used to it and I passed that time just crying. Finally I had the good idea to the take the money Isabel had left me for food or what I needed, to catch a taxi (because I didn’t know the metro) and go to the airport. I would catch the plane and go back to Ecuador. That was my idea, because I had the return flight that Thursday. I wasn’t going to say anything to Isabel. I was going to quietly go back to Ecuador. But the same time I had that idea, I realized I had accumulated more and more [debt] on my back. Now it was no longer 1,500 dollars, with the money Isabel had paid for the apartment.

So it was much more money. I started to think and saw that in Ecuador, even with more work, even if I worked day and night, I wouldn’t be able to pay back my debt to my sister. Because...there was a lot of interest from the women who had loaned the money for my trip and my investment. So, I said, ‘No, no I cannot do this to my sister.’ So I put the idea out of my mind and I resigned myself and my idea was clearer and I said, ‘I will pay off my debt and I will go, because for me this isn’t a life.’ Then the day arrived that I was supposed to go to work.
Like I explained in Chapter Two, social networks also function through obligation and
guilt. Isabel’s loan pressured Pilar to migrate, and that same debt weighed heavily on her
shoulders as she resolved to stay in Madrid and to work. Although Pilar benefited from her
relationship with Isabel, (and subsequently did not suffer from the same lack of money or food),
she was also pressured to make choices about which she was deeply ambivalent. Undoubtedly,
social networks can be supportive, exploitative and demanding all at the same time.

For domestic workers in particular, social networks are also crucial for finding
employment (Anderson 2000, Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003, Näre 2011, Parreñas 2012). In a
world without reference letters, resumes or certification, word of mouth is one of the most
important ways of finding work and getting hired. Isabel, who was technically underage when
she arrived at age nineteen, struggled to find work. Without contacts, Isabel first turned to more
formal channels, specifically Caritas (Catholic Charity). In the end, however, she needed the
direct intervention her travel companion’s aunt to find her a job. She said:

I didn’t know anyone. The girl from the apartment, another
Ecuadorian, sent me to Caritas [Catholic charity] to look for
work...I went to an interview but they didn’t want to choose me
because I was underage...But later the aunt of this boy that came
with me found a job with the daughter-in-law of her boss...or
something like that...And the aunt pretended that I was her niece
and was twenty-one years old.

Isabel’s job searching became easier once Pilar worked in Spain as well, because then the
two could help each other find employers. Pilar found her first job through Isabel’s boss; later,
Isabel found a job with one of Pilar’s employers and today she works for the nieces of Pilar’s
boss. As I will explore in Chapter Four, the layers of relationships between domestic workers
and their employers have consequences not only for being able to find work, but also for
sustaining employment and giving workers the safety net that allows them to leave unsatisfactory
work situations.

SUNDAYS OFF

Clearly, migrant workers depend on their social networks to find work and stay
employed. Their relationships also sustain a sense of community and belonging between
Ecuadorians in Madrid. Live-in workers, who both live and work in the home of their employers,
are especially reliant on their social networks. Most live-in workers only receive Sundays off, so
they are effectively working all day, six days a week. With only one free day a week, they must
take advantage of their time in order to nurture their relationships in Ecuador and to build their
social networks in Spain. For example, Pilar and Isabel used their free day to call their family in
Ecuador and to develop friendships in Madrid. Pilar explained that on Sundays she would leave
the urbanización\(^7\) where she worked and go into Madrid. She said:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{During the Sundays in Spain, since I was working outside of } \\
\text{Madrid...they would give me the Sundays off, but I would get up, } \\
\text{get dressed and everything. There was a schedule, it wasn’t like } \\
\text{here [inside Madrid] where the buses come frequently, on Sundays } \\
\text{they only came once an hour. We continued to go there [the } \\
\text{apartment where both she and Isabel had first arrived]. But now we } \\
\text{didn’t have a room. We just arrived to the living room. We didn’t } \\
\text{sleep there. So I’d arrive and I’d call my parents. If I arrived at } \\
\text{noon, it was only a little time, because I had to be back at my work } \\
\text{by ten at night. And there were many people who traveled, so } \\
\text{sometimes the buses would be full and they would leave. So many } \\
\text{times I had to be at the bus stop by eight in order to catch the nine } \\
\text{o’clock. So between noon and six or seven, I had a chance to see } \\
\text{my friends, to call my parents or to buy something personal. So I } \\
\text{had only six hours on Sundays between coming from so far away } \\
\text{and returning, which took up almost all the day.}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^7\) An urbanización is a suburban, gated neighborhood where several houses are next to each
other, but closed within the same gate, often on one street. They often share services like water
and electricity.
Even though Pilar and Isabel lived and worked in the homes of their employers, they still paid a fee to keep some of their luggage at the first apartment where they had stayed as recent arrivals. On Sundays they would go back to that same apartment to spend a few hours before returning to work. As Pilar described, between getting up and dressed, busing into Madrid and back out, she only had five or six hours free on Sundays.

Why did she and Isabel choose to keep renting from the apartment in Madrid? With only a few free hours each week, it seemed unreasonable to me that they would pay a fee to come back on Sundays. The overpriced apartment that was home to their most negative early memories of Spain was also the place they choose to stay on their free day. I could not understand it. Then Pilar explained to me one afternoon, while we were riding the bus, that the apartment was better than the street. Unlike the homes of their employers (where they were servants twenty-four hours a day) and unlike the street (where they were at risk of being apprehended by the police and then deported), the apartment became a space they could claim as their own. Even though the apartment was overpriced and had seen their worst weeks in Spain, it was still an autonomous space. In the apartment no one could tell them to wash the dishes or to clean up after someone else’s spills. No employers could monitor their every move. Like the social networks that were at the same time supportive and exploitative, the apartment offered freedom from their employers’ gaze despite the crowded rooms of strangers. Moreover, as I will explain in Chapter Four, the apartment provided them temporary housing when moving between jobs, a security that decreased their risk of homelessness when quitting one job without another lined up.
FRIENDSHIPS ON THE BUSES

As Pilar described, much of her Sunday off was spent riding the bus and waiting at the bus stop. Although transportation could be anxiety producing because of the presence of policemen and the threat of deportation, the buses were also Pilar’s space for developing friendships outside of her sister. She explained:

I met my friends in the bus when we went back to work. In my first job I would catch the bus and go back to town. There the majority of the buses were full of workers. We’d return to work the same way. When I was riding the bus about eleven years ago, it was normally live-in workers. You leave during the day but at night you have to be back in the house. So I met my friends in the bus, because I didn’t have any friends. Now it’s been almost eleven years and I’ve maintained my friendships.

In her first years in Spain Pilar was a live-in worker about forty minutes outside of Madrid. Her schedule for the day off mirrored the schedules of most other domestic workers in the city, allowing her to meet the other workers who also were seeking social networks outside of their employers. Moreover, when Isabel brought over her husband in 2008, her relationship with Pilar changed. Suddenly Isabel wanted to spend all her free time with her husband and Pilar felt very alone. Thus, the weakening of her relationship with her sister pushed her to look for social contacts elsewhere.

Today her friends live all over Madrid, because many are live-out workers instead of live-in workers, and many have reunited their families in Spain. They no longer see each other on the buses every week, but Pilar feels that their friendships have lasted for the past eleven years. Friendships that bloomed on the buses were maintained over the years by important events like birthdays. She said:

One of them lives here (a neighbor). The others work in different places…here in Madrid, but in different parts. We see each other
very little now. Back then they didn't have boyfriends, children. We were alone, single. Now some of us, like me, I've gotten married and another has her boyfriend, another has her son and the one who lives nearby is married and has her children. Now we have our families and there isn't time.

Despite all that, we always get together for each other’s birthdays. On each birthday, well, there are all us friends. For example, in July it will be Rosario’s birthday, the one who lives nearby. We’ll definitely get together for her birthday. Later in August it’s the birthday of two friends and we’ll get together again to celebrate. For example, when it was my birthday in March we got together. We see each other once in awhile and say, ‘How are things going? How are you?’ And we remember how so many years have passed and we’re still all friends.

This has been so important to me because they were like my family. Isabel got married and her husband came over and on the Sundays (before I started studying) I would say, ‘Now, it's Sunday and where am I going to go?’ So I’d call my friends and say, ‘Hi, where are you?’ They’d say ‘Where are you? In your work? If you want to, come over to the apartment and stay with us.’ So with all my friends I’d call them ‘Can I come visit you?’ ‘Yes, yes. Come over, I’m at home.’ So I’d go with them. Because it wasn’t the same with Isabel because her husband was there and on the weekends, of course, they wanted to be together, to go out together, to go shopping and everything. I felt like a busybody, as they say here. A busybody, to be with them. So I went my own way, which was better. Sundays were like that, until I started studying.

As Pilar described, for migrants who have lived in Spain for several years, processes of family reunification can alter social networks in Spain. When Isabel’s husband came to Madrid, the relationship between Pilar and Isabel (and their reliance on each other) changed. The same can be said for Pilar and Isabel today. Pilar no longer relies on her friends from the buses for social support because now she lives with her husband, her sister, her brother-in-law and her niece. The other women on the bus have also reconstructed and reunified their families, allowing them to rely less on other migrant workers.
Further, social networks are transformed by live-in or live-out situations. As live-in workers, Pilar and Isabel desperately waited for Sundays to be able to leave their employer’s home, to see their friends, call their parents, and to have some space for themselves. However, for the past three years they have been live-out workers, meaning that they rent their own apartment together. Live-out work allows them to come home to their own space each night. It creates less of an urgency to develop friendships with other migrant domestic workers on their Sundays off.

PUBLIC SPACES AND CLAIMING CITIZENSHIP

Back when they were live-in workers, Pilar and Isabel also frequented public parks and squares, some of which converted into Latin American-dominated spaces on Sunday afternoons. Because the vast majority of migrant domestic workers get Sundays off, public parks and squares are often filled with workers enjoying their free day. For live-in workers especially, Sunday public gatherings allow freedom from the purview of their employers and a chance to connect with other Ecuadorians. Public parks are welcoming spaces where migrant domestic workers can meet each other to strengthen and expand their social networks, while enjoying some reminders of home: Ecuadorian music, food and volleyball tournaments.

Urban public spaces, in particular, are central for these social and cultural connections. On the one hand, the street can make migrant live-in workers feel vulnerable to the threat of deportation. On the other, public plazas can provide a level of anonymity that protects undocumented workers. For example, Pilar explained the fear she felt when leaving the house on Sundays:

It’s the same with leaving the house, this feeling like a delinquent, hiding from the police, to try to go to places where there are police…or if you see a policeman you remember them telling you not to run into them in the street.
Isabel felt the same way whenever she left the house on Sundays or to run errands. She described her fear of the police catching and deporting her when she was still undocumented:

At that time the police were looking for immigrants everywhere. Yes, I remember that in the bus stations I was afraid of the police. I was afraid they would send me back to Ecuador. Since I had to catch the bus to go to work or some other place and there were also many police there. I would see the police and hide behind the bus. I hid so that they wouldn’t stop me and send me to Ecuador. Then they were looking for undocumented people to send back to their countries.

For Pilar and Isabel, being on the street could feel just as constricting as being in their employers’ homes. While their employers supervised their behavior when they were at work, law enforcement officials policed their very presence by searching for undocumented migrants. For live-in, undocumented workers, both their employers’ home and the street could feel unsafe and uncomfortable. Thus, the feeling of ownership, however small, that came with paying for the apartment was an important release on their day off. Likewise, large urban public spaces, filled with other Ecuadorian and Latin American migrant workers, could feel like “owned” spaces as well (León and Flores 2007:183). With hundreds of domestic workers emerging from the homes of their employers for their free Sunday, there was a sense of collectivity and strength that allowed them to assert their presence to both themselves and the rest of the city.

Sociologist Saskia Sassen described “unauthorized yet recognized” immigrants as those without documents who still performed practices of citizenship like holding a job, raising children and participating in general civil society. She called these transnational migrants “social citizens” (Sassen cited in Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). The migrant workers who meet in the squares and the parks, and who attend public cultural events are practicing their “social citizenship.” Public presence, in large numbers, is part of asserting a “we”, a mechanism for
asserting ownership and a claim to space (León and Flores 2007), despite undocumented status and precarious work situations.

For live-out workers, migrants who have lived in Spain for many years, and those with residency, like Pilar and Isabel, their social networks shift from meeting on the buses and in the major public parks to building communities in the multinational neighborhoods in which they live. While their presence at the parks on Sunday afternoons asserted their claim to the city, now their claims are based on residency in their own right, in their apartment and own community. Even though Pilar and Isabel have dual nationality, they still fit Sassen’s idea of “social citizen” because they perform citizenship practices by visiting the parks on Sundays, shopping at Ecuadorian-run businesses, attending neighborhood church services and enrolling Isabel’s daughter in public school. Through these practices of “social citizenship,” they are asserting their presence as full citizens in the urban fabric of Madrid. As Pilar explained, their presence, along with hundreds of thousands of other Ecuadorians, has forced Spain to recognize its changing population. She said:

You also note that here in Spain things have changed. For example, you note that the supermarkets didn’t know how to eat the gizzards of the chicken or the legs. And now they are selling the gizzards for the Ecuadorians and the immigrants. They also sell the legs of the chickens. The legs seem more for the immigrants because we have the custom of eating that way...Before they only sold Spanish things, Spanish products, but now you see Ecuadorian products. Even though they say that we take away, we are also giving work and spending money here. That’s why they bring things from Ecuador, like cheese and cola from Ecuador...And you also see mestizos. You see people of all colors, above all in the capital of Madrid, even more than Barcelona (despite that they say that in Barcelona). For example there are areas, like a place about four streets from here, and there is majority Dominicans and Ecuadorians. Here perhaps there are not many but in that area there are many Ecuadorians. And of course, it’s like being somewhere in Ecuador to see so many there and so few Spaniards.
Pilar is describing how she and other immigrants are transforming Madrid. Not only are there new products in the grocery stores, targeted for immigrants, but entire neighborhoods have become Latin American dominated. As she says, “Even though they say that we take away, we are also giving work and spending money here.” Positioning herself as a worker, a social citizen and a consumer, Pilar argues that she and her migrant community have contributed to Spain and deserve recognition. From life as undocumented live-in workers, fearing the police whenever they left the house, to life as women with dual nationality who rent their own apartment, Pilar and Isabel have experienced great transformations in Spain over the past twelve years. In large part, this is due to their ability to rely on, maintain and expand their social networks, especially as workers in the domestic sector.
CHAPTER FOUR
CARE WORK

It was me who was like the mother of the boy. I was in charge of getting him up in the morning, giving him the bottle, dressing him, taking him to the nursery. Later, in the afternoon, picking him up from the nursery, taking him to the house, giving him food, having him take a nap. I would get him up from the nap, give him a snack, and take him for a walk to the park. Sometimes la señora would come with us to the park. But when we arrived home I would wash him, give him dinner and very rarely would she help put him to sleep.

Pilar, discussing her first job in Spain

DEFINING CARE WORK

How do we define the labor that Pilar and Isabel have performed over the last decade? Throughout this thesis I will call them domestic workers, but other terms include maids, nannies or hired help. Traditionally, all work associated with the home and the family has been called “domestic work.” It includes cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, the ill and the elderly. Domestic work is generally conceptualized as part of the private sphere of the household. In the eyes of economists, households are seen as unproductive sites of consumption, meaning that labor within the home is invisible and does not contribute to the economy (Barker 2005). Thus, domestic work is seen as unproductive, and therefore justifiably unpaid. Historically, women have been expected to perform domestic work in their own homes without remuneration and this devaluation of domestic work translates to low pay for women who work in other families’ homes.

However, domestic work is actually reproductive labor; it is the work that allows other “productive” work to occur (Barker 2005, Parreñas 2001). Parents cannot hold jobs if there is no one to watch their children, just as laborers cannot perform well if they have not eaten before
coming to work. While domestic work has been historically devalued and unrecognized by classical economists, it is actually the labor that allows all social systems to function. Without someone to cook, clean, and care for children and the elderly no one would be able to spend time doing other “productive” tasks.

Furthermore, as Bridget Anderson, a sociologist of migration and citizenship writes, domestic work is reproductive within a social context. She explains that while washing clothes may not be crucial for survival, it is critical for complying with cultural norms and facilitating social relationships. She writes, “Particularly for the middle classes of the industrialized world, it [domestic work] is bound up with the reproduction of life-style and, crucially, of status” (Anderson 14:2000). As work that maintains the home, often the site of status, domestic work is socially and culturally reproductive because it reinforces and enables societal ideas about practices of family, cleanliness, life-style and care.

As I will elaborate in this chapter, domestic work entails much more than the simple cleaning, cooking and caring in the home. It involves status, hierarchy, cultural norms, ideals and taboos, as well as trust, power and vulnerability. Recognizing these complicated aspects of domestic work, and the devaluation and delegitimizing of domestic work as “real” labor, feminist economists (e.g. Folbre 2012) have coined the phrase “care work” and “care workers”. Care work acknowledges the profound emotional labor that domestic work requires, and the skills that it takes to care. More than just the physical actions of cleaning, cooking and keeping children safe, care work is also emotionally and mentally strenuous. Often it involves emotional labor, like listening, empathizing and counseling (Anderson 2000, Rivas 2003).

Pilar has worked for the same family over the past eight years, caring for the elderly grandmother in her nineties until she passed away. She found it physically exhausting to care for
a fully-grown person, but also emotionally draining to provide care for the grandmother who both appreciated Pilar’s work and resented her increasing dependence on a care worker. Pilar elaborated:

The woman I took care of was very hard work. She was ninety-six years old and in a wheelchair. I had to help her go to the bathroom and she would cry. It was very difficult because I had to clean her bum. You can wash a child, but it is hard to do that for an adult, and she cried and I thought, ‘This cannot be happening to me.’

Well, the woman had a very strong character when she got angry and one day she wanted me to help her up, because she couldn’t get herself up. She wanted to go outside, but I couldn’t take her because there was another woman who came who was much taller and much stronger. [The family employed another woman who would take the grandmother for walks.] So, since I couldn’t, I told her, ‘No, no.’ Seeing that I wasn’t obeying her, she got up with her walking stick and began to hit me with the cane.

The other daughter was there and she said, nervously, ‘Mama, what are you doing?!’ I was terrified and I fainted. At once they called for all the daughters, because they weren’t living in the house then. One came and apologized and calmed the mother.

But at heart the woman, when she was well, she was calm and she was very good, very affectionate. She always thanked me, she took my hand and she said, ‘So many thanks my daughter for everything you do for me, I love you a lot, you are very good.’ She showed me affection, an affection that was very sincere and came from her heart. When her temper blew up, it blew up, but when she was well, she showed me only affection.

In this narrative, Pilar is negotiating her relationship with the elderly mother and with the daughters who employ her. As the caregiver, she has to provide both support and boundaries for the care-receiver, in this case the elderly mother. However, as an employee, she has to answer to the daughters, who have their own conceptions of ideal care and behavior. Of course, Pilar also cleaned the house and cooked for the entire extended family while simultaneously caring for the mother.
Thus, Pilar’s work, like most care work, is mentally strenuous because it requires the ability to perform several tasks at the same time. For example, Bridget Anderson explains that when a care worker prepares lunch, she must cook something that is nutritious, appetizing, fits with the schedule of the children or employers, and uses the ingredients that are available (Anderson 2001). Care work requires flexibility and the capacity to plan around someone else’s schedule. For instance, domestic workers who care for young children do not rest while the latter naps, but use that time to clean and perform other chores. Care workers like Pilar and Isabel work long days, rarely taking breaks. When I interviewed Isabel in May 2013, she was working twelve hours a day at three different houses. She stated:

Yes it’s a lot. Sometimes I get tired, after so much time working like crazy. Sometimes my body gets so tired that I can’t do it anymore. But I’m going to continue this way as long as I can. And when I can’t anymore, well, I can’t. I’ve noticed that after so much time on my feet, my feet swell. I went to the doctor and they said that it’s because I spend so much time on my feet. I’m always standing. As I say to my husband, you should have a hidden camera and watch me because I don’t even sit for a second. Or if I do sit for a moment, it would be excessive to say twenty minutes. In the whole day! Or I have to do everything very quickly to be able to sit down for a little before la señora returns. Because when la señora returns I have to prepare the food, I have to do this and that. Then I go to my next job and I don’t stop until I leave.

Isabel is a “live-out” worker, called externa, because she lives in her own apartment and only works certain hours each day. Live-in work, as I will explain later in this chapter, is particularly demanding. However, live-out work has its own complexities as well. As Bridget Anderson writes, “Live-out work then, makes great demands, including efficient time management, finding work and travelling between jobs” (Anderson 46:2000). Isabel’s normal schedule requires her to work from eight in the morning till eight at night, moving through three different houses each day.
She laid out her schedule:

Well, I leave the house at seven thirty and I arrive to work at eight. I arrive and do the chores and never stop. Since I work hours [paid by the hour] I have to get things done. So from eight till ten I am in one house and I have to do the cleaning and ironing. It’s the same in the other house, where I work from ten till twelve. They are only two hours, so I do whatever I can get done, because of course I can’t do everything. In the afternoon I work from one till eight, cooking, washing, cleaning and ironing.

Like other forms of undervalued work, employers expect far more productivity than is reasonable within short periods of time. Isabel is expected to complete all the tasks her employers assign her within her two or four hour shift at their house, hopefully finishing the tasks early so that she has time to make it to her next house on time. If she does not, then they may grow to see her as an idle, lazy worker and fire her (a threat that is particularly frightening given the economic crisis in Spain).

Clearly, care work is unappreciated despite its demanding nature. Partly this is due to cultural conceptions of women as mothers and “natural” caregivers. If caring comes “naturally” to women, then it must be easy and require few skills, marking it as less valuable labor. This discourse allows men to disengage from the private sphere of the home and to leave care work to women without a second thought. Although worldwide women have entered the workforce rapidly, gender roles in regards to care work have changed very little, with women still bearing the brunt of the labor.

Moreover, in the popular imaginary, caring is an act of love rather than a type of work. A clean house is a reflection of a mother’s pride, delicious food demonstrates the affection of a grandmother, etc. Even in advertisements for cleaning products, the use of the “right brand” of detergent to wash a husband’s shirts is one way for a wife to show love (Anderson 2000). While care workers may feel affection or love for their employers and those they care for, they are still
operating within asymmetrical power relations that can become exploitative labor relations. As Bridget Anderson writes, “...the problem is that while X doing something for Y may demonstrate X’s love for Y, it may also demonstrate Y’s power over X – and these two are not mutually exclusive” (Anderson 115:2000). Although Pilar felt love for the baby she cared for in the first family, her constant attention to the child demonstrated the power of her employer to control Pilar’s time.

Yet, cultural ideals still understand domestic work to be the invisible labor done by wives, sisters and mothers and motivated by love. As such, the government has been slow to regulate and protect migrant care workers (Anderson 2001, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003, Lutz 2011). As Dawn Lyon, a sociologist who researches care work in Italy explains, “The location of work being a private residence, and its naturalization as a feminine activity, seems to have placed it in a realm beyond ordinary regulation” (Lyon 220:2006). As the historically unpaid, invisible work of women in the home, care work is still not appreciated as “real” labor and thus not subject to the same basic regulations and protections as other labor markets.

**CARE WORK AND CITIZENSHIP STATUS**

Typically, care workers are seen as unskilled and low-status workers and are paid very little for the labor they perform. For migrants workers like Pilar and Isabel, their race and immigration status mark them as even lower status workers, making their working situation even more precarious: low paid, barely regulated and insecure. As a live-in worker, caring for the elderly mother, Pilar was paid about 1,000 (USD$1,300) Euros a month. When the elderly mother died, the family lowered her pay to 750 (USD$973) Euros. She argues that she is well paid because legally, the lowest an employer can pay a (documented and registered) worker is 625 Euros (USD$860) a month.
Ecuadorian men who found work in construction before the economic crisis in 2008 earned two or three times more than women in domestic work, even though domestic workers put in many more hours (Herrera 2008). Immigrant-receiving countries like Spain benefit from the labor of migrant domestic workers, but do not thoroughly regulate it or offer protection to migrant women (Anderson 2000, Lagomarsino and Torre 2007, Freedman 2003). Undocumented workers cannot file reports of employer abuses without jeopardizing their jobs. They cannot quit one job easily and find another without significant risk. Helma Lutz, a sociologist who focuses on gender and migration, writes about migrant domestic work as the “... twilight zones of informal labour markets” (192:2011). Undocumented migrant care workers face uncertain working conditions and legal situations.

Often, they rely on their employers to get regularized by the Spanish government, creating another level of vulnerability. Both Pilar and Isabel faced difficulties filing for their residency papers as recent arrivals. Their first employers did not help them, and, in Isabel’s case, actually deceived her. In 2001, Isabel asked her employers to file for her residency card. She explained:

My employer found a lawyer and everything. They said that within about three months the response to my residency card would arrive. Later, seeing that the card had never arrived, I called the lawyer to ask what had happened to the response to my application. They said, ‘Look. I’ve already given the papers to your employers to sign them, but they never returned them or anything and now your papers have expired.’...So my employers had known and had received the card but had hidden it. So I continued illegally in that house...my employers did not want to pay social security. Supposedly that’s why they didn’t give me the papers. Once I’d signed them and had the residency card, they would have had to give me social security. And that’s exactly what they didn’t want to do.
Studies of migrant domestic workers have found that it is not uncommon for employers to avoid helping employees file for residency or to actively oppose workers’ attempts to do so (e.g. Parreñas 2001). Employer mistreatment and abuse of undocumented workers is a problem worldwide, and especially so in domestic work. With the invisible nature of care work, and the already unregulated hours and pay, undocumented care workers face greater exploitation. For example, as an initially undocumented worker, Pilar had very limited legal protection when she was working for her first family. She described the fear that she lived under during her first years in Spain:

They [my employers] are conscientious in the pay, but not in the hours. They have me work from seven thirty in the morning practically until nine or nine thirty at night, without a break. The law here, for domestic workers, calls for two hours of break in the afternoon. I didn’t have it, perhaps because I never opened my mouth to say, ‘I have a right.’ And more than anything, because the boss for whom my sister worked, that is to say the cousin of my boss, threatened her. ‘I am going to turn you into the police because you are illegal, I am going to turn you in and they’ll take you away.’ So perhaps because of fear we stayed quiet and did what they said, flattening our ears. Of course, the immigrant, with the fear that they will report you, can’t do anything...That they will report you and deport you to your country. Because this happens. So, with this fear, you can’t say anything and you stay quiet. It’s the same with leaving the house, this sensation of being like a delinquent, hiding from the police. But, thanks to God, the police never found me illegally. It’s better now that I have my papers. They run into me and sometimes they make me stop and look at my documents.

Pilar’s first employer, just like Isabel’s boss, did not want to help file for her legal papers. As she describes, fear and vulnerability keep undocumented care workers a docile, cheap labor force. Afraid of deportation, they do not report most employer abuses or insist on their rights to fair pay and working hours. Even documented and educated care workers also suffer from a lack of government regulation. Pilar has had three years of high school education and nursing training.
in Spain and is now a full Spanish citizen. Although she understands that she has rights, albeit limited ones, the law is still murky and clearly unevenly enforced.

Right now I have a classmate from my province, she works three hours on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and she also has a right to “las medias pagas,” although less than most. She has rights. She has rights to social security and that day the teacher asked her, ‘You know that you have rights?’

The law passed in 2012, this year. If we get sick, we have fifteen days for whatever accident we’ve had, but the employer pays us for four days. And later, after the four days, the days at the doctor, they pay the social security. When you are pregnant, you have the right to four months of maternity leave.

...All the employers have the obligation, to the workers, to follow the rules. We [domestic workers] were isolated, a group of workers who nobody noticed and we were always last. And now we get our social security. But at least we have some rights. Before we didn’t have any. And since then, this June all the workers have the opportunity to be workers for social security. For example, in my house, my employer has to do it [register me]. If she doesn’t then it’s like I don’t get the social security. I lose the years of social security...if she doesn’t do it, then the government leaves me. They don’t register me in this group with everybody. I lose all the rights I’ve gotten over the past seven years and they no longer belong to me. It’s like starting over. What does the government do? Well, if they don’t do it [register me], they [the government] take all the money.

For example, my boss says. ‘Pilar, I have to deduct because the law isn’t just about the worker, but also the social security.’ Now we workers have to pay, even though it’s just a little, we always have to pay. They have to deduct from my monthly and I don’t care because I am Spanish and I have rights and I also have obligations. I say, ‘I don’t disagree. If I have to pay, I have to pay because I am a worker on top of everything and I have [Spanish] nationality.’

As workers Pilar and Isabel contribute to the Spanish social security system. Currently, there is an agreement between Ecuador and Spain that documented migrants will be able to

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*Las medias pagas* are paid to domestic workers every December and June.
receive their social security even if they go back to Ecuador. Yet, the Spanish government does not protect undocumented workers. Clearly, rights, social security payments and regularization vary greatly depending upon the employer. In some houses Pilar and Isabel have been able to register, to pay social security and to receive regular paychecks. Other employers have prevented them from getting regularized, paid them less than the standard, and expected unreasonable work hours. Given the lack of clear and enforced government regulation for migrant care workers, employers can exercise greater control, and sometimes exploitation, of their employees.

In addition, care work is not just an economic transfer, but also a type of social work that maintains and reproduces status, privilege and power, thus complicating the relationship between employers and employees (Anderson 2001). Employers often operate under the cultural assumption that non-European women are “naturally” good at domestic work. As many researchers on migrant domestic work have shown, employers utilize racist and nationalist beliefs in lieu of letters of recommendation or other qualifications (Ambrosini and Quierolo Palmas 2007, Anderson 2000, Harzig 2006, Herrera 2008, Lyon 2006, Näre 2011, Parreñas 2001). For example, there are stereotypes about who is clean, who has good morals, who is nice and who is happy. “Women from some Latin American countries, according to the interviewees, have ‘sweet’ temperaments making them good carers (but not as good cleaners)” (Lyon 2006:223). By essentializing and naturalizing the work of non-white women, employers maintain their own social status as skilled individuals who are full citizens and full participants in more valuable labor markets. They reinforce their higher status because they have “better things” to do than clean, cook or care for their families (Ehrenreich in Global Woman 2003).

Domestic workers also reproduce the status of their employers because they do the dirty work, while their employers keep their hands clean (Anderson 2001). The domestic worker, not
the employer, is the one charged with picking up the family’s messes, cleaning the bathrooms and scrubbing the floors. It is she who takes out the trash and washes the sheets. Not only do her employers have “better things” to do, they have cleaner, more skilled and more valued tasks to perform.

Another way domestic workers reinforce the status of their employers if through wearing uniforms. By wearing a uniform, the worker is clearly marked as a low status actor. Unlike the employers, who wear whatever they desire in their home, the care worker’s identity is subsumed by the work she performs. In Pilar’s first job she was required to wear a uniform, much to her discontentment. She said:

She [my boss] came and said, ‘Pilar, you need to put this on each morning and you have to leave ready to work.’ I saw the uniform and took it. Seeing the uniform, I started to cry. I said, ‘Even though I have studied a little in Ecuador, I have to put on this uniform like a servant.’ I said, ‘It can’t be.’ I cried, thinking, ‘No. What have I come to here?’

For Pilar, the uniform represented her new status in Spain, as a servant of the household. She said, “For me, this was a very difficult humiliation, even though I knew it was coming.” By requiring that she wear a uniform, her employers marked her as a servant and a low status social actor.

**COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIPS**

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of these complicated power dynamics for Pilar was the relationship she had with the first children she cared for. In her quote at the very beginning of this chapter, Pilar explained how she was like the mother for the youngest baby. She elaborated:

When I arrived one [child] was a year and a half and the other was five months old. So very small. I grew very fond of the little five-month-old because I helped raise my niece [Isabel’s daughter]. When I arrived I really missed my niece and the affection tricked
me into feeling like I was with her and taking care of her. The little boy kept growing and since he was a baby everything was fine.

So the child was growing and the two and a half year old was not so good. He was always saying, ‘You are stupid. Let me do what I want, I don’t love you. Why don’t you go away?’ I had to put up with him. But when the little one started to talk, he heard what his brother said and also started saying, ‘You are stupid; I don’t love you; go away.’ But I endured it, saying to myself, ‘I have to pay my debt and then I’ll leave.’

As the babies grew older and began to talk more, she found that they had absorbed the attitudes of their parents, becoming full participants in the power relations with Pilar that put them at the top of the social hierarchy. At the young age of two, they had already learned that Pilar was low status and did not deserve their respect. Yet, Pilar still had to continue caring for them, despite their mistreatment of her, while careful to avoid upsetting their mother. She said:

I reached a point with the children when I couldn’t take any more. It was the feeling that I was psychologically unwell. I would feed the children and they would say ‘Stupid, you’re stupid. I don’t love you.’ And of course, it hurt. And the mother, when she was with one child and I was with the other, she never said, ‘Hey, don’t do that to Pilar. Watch it. You don’t behave like that.’ No, she never said that. And that’s what hurt me the most, because she knew they behaved badly with me and she never punished them. Like any other mother who would say ‘Don’t do that.’ She never said anything.

Because care work is such personal and intimate labor, the relation between employer and employee involves trust as well as contracts. Typically domestic workers in Spain do not have formal or legally binding contracts. Rather, their job is dependent on confianza between the employer and care worker. Their “moral” contracts are based on notions of good and bad, reciprocity and responsibility. For example, employers must trust that the domestic worker will care for their children responsibly, will not steal anything and will not waste time. In this case, Pilar’s employer trusted that Pilar would take good care of her young children.
On the other hand, care workers must trust that their employers will actually pay them, will not physically or emotionally abuse them and will trust them to get the job done right (Näre 2011). Engaged in work that blurs the boundaries between insider and outsider, family member and stranger, care workers must negotiate the emotionally fraught terrain of the home. This makes their work even more precarious because relationships of trust and respect can quickly be broken between employers and employees (Lutz 2011). In Pilar’s narrative above, the trust between her and her employer is rapidly breaking down as the children mistreat her and her employer does not chastise them “like any other mother” would.

As part of this relationship of trust, sometimes employers decide to “test” recently hired domestic workers in order to see if they are trustworthy. They will leave out money or jewelry, trying to catch the care worker stealing from them. Before letting a worker into their home, employers have to assuage their own sense of apprehension and concern about allowing a stranger into family space. Isabel described her experiences of being “tested” whenever she was a recent hire. She continued:

They test in every house when you first start working. They leave money around to see if I take it. And jewelry too. In my job in the afternoon, they have jewelry there. Once I worked in a watch shop and they had a safe. They knew that I came to clean the boxes where the watches were. One day I came and I found that the safe was open and full of money. I was very surprised to see the watches there and the safe full of money. Good God, I was surprised, but they were good people, very good people. I don’t know if it was an accident or test that they left the money there. I froze like stone, seeing so much money there. But I don’t know if they wanted to see if I would steal something or if they trusted me. I don’t know. And it’s just like that in some houses where I’ve worked. It’s all a test. They don’t think we notice the tests they put out.

Isabel has the keys to the three houses where she currently works. She often works when her employers are not at home, so there is a strong degree of trust between them. Both domestic
workers and their employers need to feel a level of trust for the relationship to work. Because care work is so private and personal, it is situated in the “moral economy” in which relations between employers and domestic workers are based on ideas of good and bad, rather than the maximization of profit (Barker 2005, Lyon 2011, Näre 2011). Lena Näre, in her research on care work in Italy, defines the moral economy as “…a system of transactions which are defined as socially desirable (i.e. moral), because through them social ties are recognized, and balanced social relationships are maintained” (Näre 339). Thus, employers look for workers who are “good” rather than the most efficient or most qualified. They want workers with whom they will feel comfortable. Socially desirable transactions reaffirm relationships, and in the case of domestic work, they reaffirm hierarchies of power and privilege.

**LIVE-IN LABOR**

Many migrant women are live-in workers, meaning that they live in the home of their employers. As live-in workers, employees allow their employers to maintain cultural conceptions of informal family care as the ideal practice (over childcare centers, nursing homes or hospitals) (Lyon 2006). A live-in nanny is more appealing than a public childcare center in cultures where the ideal model is a stay-at-home mother.

Recently arrived migrants often prefer to do live-in work because they feel the pressure of debt upon their shoulders and live-in labor means no rent payments. However, live-in work makes domestic workers particularly vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of their employers. Live-in workers often face inconsistent pay, like receiving hand-me-down clothing from their employers instead of money. Their work hours are often irregular, with only one free day a week. For example, live-in workers may be awakened in the middle of the night to care for children or to assist an elderly family member in using the bathroom (Anderson 2000).
Both Pilar and Isabel have experienced various issues with *interna* (live-in) work. Working as an *interna* allows domestic workers to save more money, allowing them to pay off their initial debt more quickly. It took Pilar and Isabel about a year for each to pay off her debt incurred in the initial migration project\(^9\). However, *interna* work also means that domestic workers are basically “on-call” all day. When Pilar and Isabel worked as *internas*, their schedules required them to work from 7am till 10pm with a brief half-hour rest.

Finally, live-in workers also face social isolation. They spend all day in the home of their employers, working a schedule that does not give them time to meet other people, to find other opportunities for work or to have personal time. For this reason, the social networks that migrant domestic workers are able to form during the one free day each week (typically Sundays) are extremely important to maintain (Anderson 2000, Anderson 2001, Näre 2011, Parreñas 2001). Isabel worked as an *interna*, for her first three years in Spain. Afterwards, she found work as an *externa* and vowed never to work as an *interna* again. She explained:

> At first I liked *interna* work better because I could save and send more to pay off my debt. But later, I saw the cost as equal between *interna* and *externa*. I spent the same. So I decided to leave because working as an *interna* I felt closed in four walls. I couldn’t leave. I couldn’t see people. I was suffocated. I prefer *externa*. Every day I leave, I see other people and I am distracted and entertained. I don’t want *interna* work anymore. That’s like being inside four walls. *Todos los santos días*. Without my own life. *Externa*, in contrast, makes me feel free. I go to work; I see other people; I make friends.

Live-in work also blurs the line between personal life and work, to the point where workers’ *selves* are controlled by the family for whom they work. As Bridget Anderson writes,

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\(^9\) Loans and repayment time can vary. Most migrants in Bridget Anderson’s study of domestic labor in Europe said that they had been told it would take a year to pay off their debt, but that living expenses, family emergencies and unexpectedly higher costs actually made it take longer to truly pay off their debt (see Anderson 2000:29).
“It is as if the employer is buying, not just her time, but her very self” (Anderson 43:2000).

Migrant care workers are expected to shower when it is convenient for the family, to eat whatever the family eats and to express gratitude (Näre 2011). Because they live with the family and perform emotional and intimate labor, care workers are often understood to become “one of the family.” The discourse of “one of the family” is used to carve a space for the care worker within family life, but that space is not always stable or comfortable.

While the relationship may be affectionate and endearing, it can also be used to demand that workers perform inappropriate tasks, work more hours, or work without pay (Parreñas 2001). As sociologist Lena Näre writes, “…in many cases the use of familial terms was not genuine, but a way to enforce an unequal power relationship. Presenting a labour relationship as a fictive kin relationship was often a strategy to demand extra hours from the worker or increase his/her work load” (406). “One of the family” allows employers to make otherwise inappropriate demands on care workers. For example, Pilar has worked with the same family for the past eight years. Over the last two years she has grown increasingly frustrated with this family because they have increased her workload without increasing her pay. Whereas at first she had to cook for the elderly mother and her three middle-aged daughters, now she often has to cook for many members of the entire extended family (and with little notice). Because she has been with this one family for so many years, their close relationship allows them to make additional demands on her within the framework of “one of the family.” As a member of the family, of course she should be willing to cook for all the relatives who visit.

Conversely, the discourse of “one of the family” also allows migrant workers to push for a degree of accountability from their employers. Care studies experts have problematized notions of migrant care workers as simple victims of exploitation at the hands of their employers.
Notably, Lena Näre argues that migrant women are also actors in the moral economy of care. This means that they also seek “good” families, even if those families pay less. Migrant women are more likely to remain with families who treat them well and “care” about them, even if they do not pay as much as a family that does not treat them as respectfully (Anderson 2000, Näre 2011). Isabel explained what makes a good employer relationship:

In the jobs I have now, sometimes they’ll say, but with good manners, ‘Isabel, please do this.’ And I like that they say that. But with good manners, without yelling at me or anything. In the second job that I have from ten till twelve, la señora is very understanding. She says, ‘Isabel, you work a lot. Calm down. Work slowly.’ That’s what I liked about her, she’s not demanding. Or if I’m ten minutes late, ‘Isabel, don’t feel overwhelmed, relax.’ Or when I have to go to the doctor, ‘Okay, go ahead Isabel. Go to the doctor and don’t come to work.’ In the afternoon job, I don’t think it would go well. If that were her, she wouldn’t give me permission for anything...Sometimes when I feel badly I ask for permission and she says, ‘Fine, go ahead.’ But not in a good way, like ‘That’s okay, go ahead, relax, it’s alright.’

Clearly, the quality of the relationship between the worker and the employer matters, sometimes even more than the pay. What Isabel calls “good manners,” or respect, indicates a level of understanding between her and the employer that she can be trusted to get the work done. Similarly, Pilar explained how the “one of the family” discourse actually caused her later employers to ask her to stop wearing the uniform:

I have been with this family that treats me well for more than eight years. Here I also had to wear a uniform for the first two years that I was working here. Then they had me take it off because they said, ‘You are part of this house, part of this family and we don’t want to see you in the uniform.’ So it was they who bought me clothing to wear in the house and I felt much more comfortable with them, knowing that they had me get rid of something that had been a huge humiliation for me.

By acknowledging Pilar as a valuable member of the household, her employers were participating in this moral economy. Because they allowed her to stop wearing the uniform,
which she found degrading, Pilar saw the relationship between herself and her employers become more balanced and based on trust.

**THE BREAKING OF TRUST**

Of course, another aspect of this moral economy involves trust. Both parties, employers and care workers, need the other to trust them. In order to maintain a balanced social relationship, employers must trust that the care worker is hardworking, conscientious and discreet. Employees must also trust their employers to respect them, their selfhood and their work. When Isabel and Pilar found that their employers did not trust them and they could not trust their employers in return, they would soon leave their jobs. Often they would quit after what Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo calls “blow-ups,” those moments when “…the previously invisible fissures in their relationship were suddenly magnified and projected into plain view” (55:2003). Blow-ups happen over lack of trust, over too much watchfulness on the part of the employer, when employers feel like the worker is too idle, or over feelings of betrayal. These were not easy decisions to make, because as live-in workers, to quit a job meant not only economic insecurity, but also potential homelessness. Yet, both Pilar and Isabel faced “blow-ups” in which their unfair treatment by their employers became unbearable and they chose to risk financial uncertainty.

One of the reasons the sisters were able to choose to leave was because they could rely upon each other. When one quit her job, she could turn to the other to help her find another and to financially support her during the transition. Pilar explained:

> I went eight days without finding work and I was getting ready to leave [Spain]. So my sister said to me, ‘No I will help you look for work.’ So, that is when she met my current boss and she needed a woman to watch her mother and sister.

The strength of their relationship allowed Pilar and Isabel to leave their employers’ homes when the relationships of trust were irreparably broken. With each other as a safety net,
and their investment in the apartment where they stayed on Sundays, the sisters could mitigate the risk of quitting a job and losing their housing.

One of these blow-ups occurred in Isabel’s first job where she cared for two children, cooked, cleaned and did the laundry. Her room in the employer’s house doubled as the laundry room, so she had to iron and fold the family’s clothing in her room. One weekend her employer went on a trip and told Isabel to clean and put away the winter clothes and to bring out her summer clothing. There was so much work to do that Isabel wasn’t able to finish it all before her free day on Sunday. So she put the few pieces of un-ironed clothing into her own dresser drawers. When she arrived home that night her employer angrily confronted her and accused her of stealing:

She had waited until the hour when I arrived at the house and asked me why I was stealing her clothing. I said that I had left them there, but that I hadn’t been stealing. I had left them there [in my dresser] because I was afraid that she would get angry that I hadn’t finished ironing them…I’d left the dresser open and she saw it and asked me why I was robbing her. That’s when I couldn’t take it anymore. I said, ‘Fine, I’ll go.’ After almost two or three years in that house I decided that it was time to leave. But I was also afraid I couldn’t find a new job. I was afraid that she believed I was stealing her things. I remember that Pilar was working with her cousin and I went to see her. I was crying because I thought that she didn’t believe me… that my boss thought I was lying. She talked to me like I was a dog, that I was a thief and so on. Her cousin believed that I wasn’t stealing. I went to Pilar and I cried and cried. And Pilar’s boss believed me. She said, ‘I believe you. [My cousin] is very dramatic.’

In Isabel’s narrative it is clear that a relationship of trust is tenuous and easily broken. Although her employer felt secure enough to leave Isabel alone in the house except for the elderly grandmother, her employer immediately assumed that Isabel was stealing her clothing. For Isabel, at the first mention of “stealing” the slight trust she felt for her employer was broken.
To her, the employer’s willingness to assume that she was a thief, without even listening to her explanation, was a clear sign that it was time to find another job.

At this time Pilar was working for Isabel’s employer’s cousin, in the same urbanización. After this altercation Isabel went to see Pilar and her boss. Because migrant care workers are often hired through word of mouth, there are frequently several ties between the employer and the worker. Employers would rather hire the sister of the woman who works for their neighbor or cousin than hire a stranger. Similarly, Pilar and Isabel prefer to work for families that know each other. The more relationships between them, the more accountability there will be between worker and employer. Because Pilar’s boss believed Isabel, she was able to claim a higher moral stance than her employer. In the end, that did not save Isabel’s job, but it indicates the importance of the moral economy for care workers.

Pilar experienced very similar tensions in all her jobs. In the first house, the family did not trust her and the children mistreated her. She worked for them for two years and then decided that she “couldn’t take it anymore.” She said:

The woman, the entire time I worked there, was always watching me, like ‘What have you eaten? Why is the ham missing from the refrigerator? The cheese isn’t here. Who has eaten the cheese? And the fruit I bought, who’s eaten it?’ So I had the feeling that she thought that everything that was missing from the fridge had been eaten by me. And you don’t feel like that’s right or just.

That kind of distrustful behavior ruins any relationship of trust or comfort between a care worker and the family. In Pilar’s first job the children behaved badly and her employer was very suspicious. Finally, one day Pilar believed that her employer tried to trick her, to steal her monthly payment, and that destroyed the limited trust between them.

One day she came to pay me my monthly and I was in the kitchen, clearing the dishes. She said, ‘Pilar, I’m leaving the money here.’ She left me the money in a folder where she kept all the children’s
school papers. I said, ‘Thank you, I’ll take it.’ But she came back in minutes to look at the papers where she had left the money. So, when I finished cleaning the kitchen, I went to look for my money. And I realized that it wasn’t there.

As the woman had already gone to sleep, the next day I asked her, ‘Señora, my monthly that you paid me yesterday isn’t there.’ Of course she didn’t really trust me... and even more so when I told her this. ‘How could the money not be there? I left it for you right here! You put it somewhere else and you don’t remember!’ I told her, ‘Señora, I have not taken it.’ She said, ‘Look carefully in your uniform, because it will surely be there. Or you have put somewhere and don’t remember.’

Of course, I was sure that I had not taken the money. Right away she called for her husband and said, ‘Listen, Pilar’s money isn’t here, she was the only one in the house and the money has disappeared.’ She left and said to me, ‘When I return the money needs to have reappeared.’ I was afraid and I cried. I cried because it was not fair, I did not take the money. And I said, to myself, ‘She decided to lose the money. Well, fine, if she does not want to pay me, don’t pay me, but do not blame me saying that I took the money.’ She left and I started looking for it like crazy. I had the feeling that she wanted to blame me, to make me think I had taken the money. I started to look through my bedroom, which then had about four things in it [laughs].

I started to look through my room, but I couldn’t find it, couldn’t find it, couldn’t find it. Finally I started to look in the children’s room. In a folder, inside some photos, was the money. I left it there until she came home to show her where the money was. So, I showed her where it was, but I knew that she didn’t believe me. She didn’t believe me because she didn’t want to, because she knew that it was in the folder and I had not been lying and that I would not have done that to her [stolen the money]. So she said, ’Well, excuse me. Possibly when I went to get the children’s school papers I might have been confused with this folder.’ That’s what she told me. So things were not going well at all.

Finally, I decided to leave, because of that and because the children behaved so badly. When I asked her to pay me my medias pagas, which I had the right to get, she said that she had already paid me it. Here they have to pay you two wages, medias pagas in June and December. It was September and she hadn’t paid me. I said, ’But Señora you have to pay me the medias pagas because it’s now September.’ She said, ‘I’ve already paid you.’ ‘How did you pay
me? You haven’t paid me.’ ‘You don’t remember. I already paid you. I paid you in July. Don’t come here trying to get it paid again.’ Well, the only thing I could say was “Well, Señora, if you think you have paid me, it’s on your conscience, because mine is totally calm.” That was all I said. When I said goodbye to them, my boss, the husband, who was more reasonable and thoughtful...he never treated me badly, but the last words he said to me were, ‘You are not going to find a house that treats you like we have treated you. We have treated you super well. You will not find a house that will treat you like this. I’ll tell you that.’ Even with the anguish I felt, I said, ‘Hopefully that will be true. They [another house] will treat me better.’

They wanted me to think that they were good, that they were very good. In reality, they were not at all. I left, perhaps, on one hand happy to leave the family that hadn’t treated me well.

In this narrative Pilar asserts her own understanding of moral behavior, arguing that her employers were clearly “bad” within the moral economy. They did not trust her, the mother did not chastise her poorly behaving children, and they did not honor her payments. The employer’s failure to value Pilar’s work and to respect her as an employee (and as a person) reached a point where Pilar decided it was worth the economic risk to escape that abusive relationship.

It is important to understand how employers and care workers view their relationship through the lens of the moral economy because it gives care workers the space to critique the behavior of their employers, to value their own labor and to see themselves as somewhat morally superior. By interpreting the abusive behavior of their employers through a moral lens, Pilar and Isabel could motivate themselves to face economic uncertainty rather than continue to work for “bad people.”

Yet, even with the possibilities for care workers to assert their worth, their work and their selfhood, they are still low status workers who are poorly paid and largely unprotected by the government. As this chapter has shown, care work is undervalued culturally, socially and economically in ways that reinforce each other especially when it is performed by migrant
women. As invisible workers in Spain’s informal economy, migrant care workers like Pilar and Isabel must endure low wages and precarious working conditions. Further, as live-in workers and participants in the private domestic sphere, their work deals with the intimate and emotional aspects of the home. They must negotiate tricky terrain, navigating through the intimate dynamics of the home, cultural ideals of care and their own understandings of what it means to be “treated well” by an employer. Clearly, care work is so much more than the three c’s of cooking, cleaning and caring; it is labor that contends with and is influenced by social relationships, hierarchies, boundaries and power.
CHAPTER FIVE

FLOWS OF MONEY AND CARE

We didn’t have a phone in the house. We had to go to [the town center] on Sundays, and wait at the house of the madrina. We had to go on Sundays to listen. That’s how I know they suffered a lot the first days, the first months. They suffered. That’s why I said, ‘Whatever you send, I will save it here. And we will buy your land. And then we will build you a house so that you have something to show for your suffering when you come back or when you are old. And you’ll know that when you come back from there [Spain] you can arrive to your house and nobody can tell you what to do.’

- Don Tomás

As seen throughout the previous chapters, migration is a family project, rooted in the needs of the family unit. So what does it mean when a family is separated by thousands of miles over many years? How do they maintain familial relationships? How do ties of obligation and responsibility change? This chapter will explore what it means to be a transnational family, including the importance of communication practices, remittances and return visits, as well as the complexities of transnational motherhood in particular.

Transnationalism is concerned with the shifting of national boundaries and the saliency of the nation-state in the face of increasing globalization, new forms of migration and the development of new technologies. Transnational migration studies recognize that immigrants may permanently settle in a host country, but still maintain deep political, social and economic connections with their country of origin (Glick Schiller et. al 1995). Transnational migrants “…are simultaneously embedded in the multiple sites and layers of the transnational social fields in which they live” (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:130). Pilar and Isabel, for example, have lived in Spain for more than a decade and yet are still “embedded” in Ecuador. They call home regularly, visit periodically, purchase land, send money and always plan to return home “someday.”
Technology plays an important part in this ability to stay “embedded”; phone calls, money transfers, even the transportation that allows for return visits mean that migrants can live in Spain but still be deeply involved in their communities in Ecuador. The sisters call home each week to speak with their parents and hear the latest news. When they worked as internas they would call each Sunday when they had the day off. Isabel said, “On Sundays and Thursdays when I left [work], I called. Yes, every Thursday and Sunday I called them to ask about my daughter, how things were going, how she was. I wanted to know what was happening.” Calling home each week helped Pilar and Isabel remain active members in their families. By sharing information about their lives and participating in family life in Ecuador, they affirmed their membership within their family, even though they lived across the ocean. As Arlie Hochschild writes, families that are separated for long periods of time are not fractured or broken, but rather they are families “…for whom obligations do not end, but bend” (Hochschild 2000:134). Now that Pilar and Isabel rent an apartment together and work as externas, they still call every week. In fact, Sundays are still their calling day because their work schedules are too hectic on weekdays. Sometimes they use Facebook, email or a webcam, but most often they visit the cabina three blocks from their apartment, which they claim has the cheapest rates.

For the family in Ecuador, phone calls serve the same purpose that they do for the daughters – it keeps them feeling connected as active members of the same family. To remember to be at home, waiting for the phone call each Sunday morning is their obligation to their daughters. It is part of a routine that keeps them involved in the stories of their daughters’ lives, in the moments that they cannot experience together, but can hear about after the fact. A weekly phone call, while not the same as a daily interaction, is an important regular contact. Whenever I was in the home on Sundays I would participate in the phone calls. Doña Carmen would talk
first, then pass the phone to Don Tomás, or often to me so I could say hello and Pilar could anxiously inquire if I was comfortable. The phone calls kept the family up-to-date on the details of each other’s lives.

PATTERNS OF REMITTANCES

In the same way that phone calls allow transnational families to communicate, so do remittances. As seen in Chapter Two, one of the main motivators for migrating was to financially support their families. By sending money and goods each month, Pilar and Isabel help provide their families with food, clothing and health-related services. In Ecuador, remittances are the highest source of foreign exchange after petroleum exports (Herrera 153:2005). A 2003 study by FOMIN, el Fondo Multilateral de Inversiones, found that, of migrants who send remittances, the average each month was 175 dollars. In another study by FLACSO in 2001, the average of remittances was 150 dollars a month (Herrera 154:2005). Economists estimate that 90% of remittances are spent on consumer goods, while the rest are put in savings or investments, like housing (Wucker 2004).

For Ecuadorian families with a member abroad, remittances can mean the difference between comfort and privation. The money that migrants send home provides supplemental income for food, schooling and unforeseen medical expenses. Families that receive remittances enjoy improved health and education, especially for Ecuadorian children (Antón 2010). When basic survival needs are met, extra income can be used for additional expenses, like those related to children’s education. Likewise, the supplemental income sent by migrants allows families to budget for expenses that fall outside their regular needs. Thus, what is important about remittances is not necessarily their quantity, but the frequency of their arrival (Moser 37:2011).
If a family can expect to receive an extra fifty dollars each month, they can plan for additional expenses.

For example, Pilar and Isabel have helped their father pay for a set of false teeth and an operation. When their father found out that his surgery would cost 500 dollars he argued that he was not going to get it. He gave in when his daughters insisted and sent him the money for it. Pilar said, “If someone gets sick, my mama or my father, then my sister and I say ‘Go to the doctor.’ We send them [money] for the doctor. We send them medicine.”

Of course, there are gendered differences in remitting patterns. Sociologists Rhacel Salazar Parreñas and Helma Lutz have both found in their studies of migration that women send more money and more often than their male counterparts (Lutz 2011, Parreñas 2001). Other studies have shown that women are more likely to invest in assets and consumer goods (like food or medical bills), while men are more likely to invest in material goods that improve their status (like cars) (Moser 2011). Perhaps this is related to “bending” forms of obligation, in which remittances can demonstrate the migrant’s commitment to their family and justify their migration project.

Interestingly, recently arrived migrants also send home more money than those who have been in Spain for longer periods of time (Wucker 2004:39). This is partly due to the great pressure to pay off their loans. When Pilar and Isabel first arrived in Spain, they felt the urgency to pay back their initial debt. It took them each about a year to completely pay off their loans and since their loans were made in Ecuador they were sending home most of their income during that time.

Recent arrivals also feel greater obligation to send more money, given that most of their family still remains in Ecuador. Unlike families that have reunified or partially reunified in
Spain, recent arrivals are still deeply “embedded” in Ecuador. Helma Lutz writes about “doing family,” a series of everyday interactions involving shared resources, responsibilities and obligations. She ponders, “From this arises the question of how these ties are maintained and consolidated when intimacy and familiarity can no longer be established through shared everyday experiences and routines. What actions and substitute routines are developed in order to bring about lasting ties and loyalties in the transnational sphere?” (Lutz 188:2011).

Remittances are one way of maintaining these ties across time and space. Recently arrived migrants, especially women, use remittances to both financially support their families and to keep their social relationships as strong as possible.

In particular, migrant mothers find remittances especially important for maintaining familial relationships because they are often seen as “bad” mothers who have abandoned their children. Facing harsh criticism, transnational mothers are frequently painted as irresponsible and selfish for migrating and leaving their families. As Ecuadorian sociologist Gioconda Herrera writes, “This situation has received extensive play in the Ecuadorian media, and this has frequently led to the stigmatization of the children and their mothers. A moral and psychological view that stresses the destruction of families and the loss of family values prevails over social, economic and cultural considerations” (2008:104). Remittances are one way for migrant mothers to counter the rhetoric of mothers who abandon their children. As Helma Lutz writes, “Transnational mothers have to justify and defend themselves against the latent reproach of neglecting their children” (2011:139). By sending home remittances migrant mothers can assert that they do love and support their families even if from a distance (Ambrosini and Queirolo Palmas 2007, Herrera 2008, Lutz 2011, Parreñas 2003).
This means, of course, that as migrants create stronger networks in Spain and, possibly, reunify their families, remitting patterns can change (Lagomarsino 2007). For example, now that Isabel’s husband and daughter live in Spain, she sends less money to Ecuador. She brought her husband in 2008 and her daughter in the summer of 2012. She explained, “I still send a little bit for my parents. Or sometimes I help my siblings if I can. Yes, I still help a little. Not with much, but it’s something. At first I sent more, but now I send much less.”

Pilar has experienced the same phenomenon. As a recent arrival she sent almost all of the money that she earned. When she worked as an interna she could afford to send more of her income. Now that she rents an apartment and wants to start her own family, she sends much less. She said:

Except for a little, I was sending almost everything. About a year ago I realized that I needed to have money here in case something happened to me. I was sending everything because I was building my house and they would say, “It’s that we need this. We can’t buy something else.” Here I was working, I didn’t have food, or an apartment, or light or water or anything [to pay for]. So I sent all the money. And now, it is almost nothing because with the costs of the apartment, food, light, and water there is almost nothing left over. It’s preferable to have the money here in case something happens to me or my husband. It’s not like what I sent before.

Because her family is now more firmly situated in Spain (her husband, sister, niece and brother-in-law), her obligations have shifted. Rather than sending all of her money to Ecuador, she is more focused on providing for her family in Spain. However, she still sends some money to Ecuador in part due to filial duty but also accrued debt. Remitting patterns follow cycles perpetuated by debt as well as obligation. Investments in land, houses, cars and even medical expenses can increase remittances at certain times and maintain it over the years. In Pilar’s case, as soon as she had paid off her initial loans, the purchase of land created a new debt.
She explained:

After a year had passed my mother said to me...where my house is now...she had seen that land was for sale. She said, ‘Look Pilar, they are selling the land. I’m letting you know in case you want to buy it.’ And I said, ‘Yes, yes, yes I want to buy it.’ Back then the land cost about 5,000 dollars. So I said, ‘But I don’t have the money.’ ‘If you want, we’ll get a loan from the bank.’ I told her, ‘If it’s possible, then yes.’ Indeed, they took out a loan and there was another debt. So I had to keep working to pay my debt.

Pilar saw her purchase of the land (on which she would eventually construct her house) as an investment in her and her family’s future. When I asked her why she wanted that piece of land in particular she explained that she wanted to build her house in the country, but near the street. She imagined that one day she would return to Ecuador and live in the home she had built.

She described the process of building her home:

So I built more and more, and a year passed, then two years. I kept sending money and building the house. Then I had the dream of building my whole house. I built the first floor. I wanted to build the second floor. I kept sending money and they kept building me the house. Little by little and then I had the house.

Pilar’s purchase of the land created a new loan to be paid, but it also gave her the opportunity to increase her social status. Gioconda Herrera writes that the act of sending remittances is both a strategy of economic survival and a practice related to status and hierarchy (Herrera 161:2005). Investments in houses are some of the most prominent examples, but there are more subtle manifestations, like new clothing or school supplies for the children of migrants. Isabel’s daughter’s collection of shoes, for example, demonstrates her mother’s ability to send clothing and money that both provide for her daughter and allow disposable income for more “luxury” goods. Pilar mused:

They [my siblings, nieces and nephews] haven’t had the same needs that we had when I was a child. I remember as a child when I went to school, I wore broken shoes. And now to think that they
have a mountain of shoes and a mountain of uniforms...They live much better than I lived.

By identifying the ways her migration and remittances have helped her family, Pilar is able to claim credit for the sacrifices she has made, thus asserting herself as an integral provider for her family.

Remittances requires *confianza* within the family: trust of the migrants that they will continue to send money, trust of the family that they will spend it (or save it) responsibly. The daughters send the money to their parents, depositing it under their father’s name. Isabel said, “For now the one who handles my money is my father. I don’t have an account there [in Ecuador], so my father represents me. He manages the money and everything.” Given that they send back their life savings to invest in land, housing and the wellbeing of their family, they must trust that their father will guard their savings responsibly.

When I interviewed Doña Carmen and Don Tomás, they insisted that the money their daughters send is their *own*, not something collectively owned by the family. For example, when they speak of the new house in which the extended family lives, they call it *la casa de la Pilar*, and there is a room where no one sleeps but Pilar, when she visits. Don Tomás speaks about the sacrifices that his daughters have made so that one day they can return to the homes they have built. He said, “They send money to Ecuador and we save it for them till the last cent...we told her that we would save it for her. We haven’t taken even a cent. Because it’s from their work. We collect is so that when they come back they can use it for something, to buy something.” In his eyes, there is a clear distinction between money and goods that are owned by the family and those that are owned by the daughters. Although he and most of the family live in the new house, he still considers it to be “Pilar’s house” and fully expects that she will move in whenever she
comes back from Spain. Thus, although he and the rest of the family benefit from Pilar and Isabel’s remittances by having better quality food, clothing and medical care, he recognizes that those benefits will not last forever and are not owed to him.

Unmistakably, remittances are a crucial piece of the migration project and component of transnational family communicative practices. Remittances support family needs in regards to food, education and health, as well as providing an avenue for migrant women to demonstrate their commitment to their families. The money and goods migrants send home help to justify their migration project, while also allowing migrants to affirm their rising status and their position within their families.

**RETURN VISITS AND BUILDING A HOME**

Return visits to Ecuador are also part of complicated transnational familial networks. Over the past decade, Pilar and Isabel have returned home to visit several times. These trips have depended upon the regularization process (gaining residency/citizenship) and their savings. In order to leave Spain and return again, Pilar and Isabel needed legal residency. Once they had residency cards, the sisters could return home to visit and still maintain their residency status – provided that the trip lasted no more than three months. Of course, the journey also required money and time off from their jobs, heavily dependent on their employers’ willingness to give them time off when they were able to travel, rather than the month that was the most convenient for the employer themselves. Isabel said:

It depends on the job. I have a month of vacations. But la señora I worked for said, ‘Isabel, take it when you want it.’ So we counted the vacations. There are bosses who say...well, they decide the month you get off. They say, ‘Okay, go this month.’ In contrast, my boss said, ‘Look Isabel, take whatever month you want to go to Ecuador and we’ll call that your vacation.’ They made it a little easier for me.
These trips were crucial for sustaining Pilar and Isabel’s social networks and familial relationships. First and foremost, home visits were a chance for them to spend time with their family and to renew familial bonds. Both Pilar and Isabel speak about their return visits as periods of great happiness spent with their parents, siblings, and friends. These trips were an opportunity for the sisters to enjoy and affirm their new status and (perceived) wealth in their community. However, these visits also served as a reminder of why migrants left in the first place: the longer Pilar and Isabel remained at home, the faster they saw their money disappear. Soon they realized they needed to return to Spain in order to continue supporting their family.

Most importantly, visits home give migrants a chance to see their families and to briefly reintegrate into family life. Isabel returned to Ecuador for the first time after seven years of living in Spain. Because she migrated when her daughter was only five months old, it was as if she met her for the first time when Isabel returned to visit. She also reunited with the father of her daughter, who is now her husband. She described her first trip home in 2007:

> When I returned we saw each other and I went with him [my current husband]. We were talking here [in Spain], on the telephone we talked about my daughter, about her schooling and everything. Later when I went to Ecuador, we saw each other again. And he took me to his house. And we got married…I returned and he stayed. I came back to work and my boss helped me get the papers to bring my husband…The friend of my boss had a construction company and he gave me a work contract to bring over my husband. We did all the procedures and after a year of being here, I brought him too.

For Isabel a visit home gave her the chance to get to know her daughter, to marry the man who is now her husband, and to continue the migration stream. First she would bring over her husband, and then several years later, in 2012, she would reunite with her daughter as well. In essence, her visit home facilitated the reunification of her nuclear family in Spain.
Of course, return trips also allow migrants to enjoy and display their new status in their community. Many migrants invest in houses, and with each successive visit they see the construction of their home progressing. Walking along the road in Don Tomás and Doña Carmen’s village, it is easy to see which families have sent migrants abroad. These families live in two or three storey cement homes, with ample space for the members of an entire extended family. Don Tomás and Doña Carmen used to live in a two room, earthen house with eight children. They had chickens and dogs underfoot and a pig pen not forty feet from the house. Now, they live in the house Pilar has paid to build, with four bedrooms, two bathrooms, hot water and electricity. Doña Carmen even has a stove, although she still prefers to cook with the fire pit outside.

By building the house, Pilar has a new sense of status in her family and her community. She is now a property owner, and her home serves as a central location for her entire family. Her parents, three of her siblings, and two grandchildren live in it permanently, while her older sister uses one of the downstairs rooms to run a sewing business. The house itself is a physical marker of Pilar’s new status and success as a migrant.

Today the old house is falling down. The family uses it as storage and keep the pigs there, walking the three minutes from Pilar’s house to feed them each day. However, the paint has long since chipped away, and walls are cracking and the building is in disrepair. When talking about her new house, Pilar said:

Little by little, saving and with support from my parents, [I built my house]. I built my house, where they are now living, and it’s a huge happiness. For example, my mama always dreamed of a house with two floors. For them it’s a great happiness to know that they are living there in the best conditions of their lives. Although I always remember my childhood and my parents’ house that is smaller and simpler than mine, but I remember it very happily. So I
cannot say that I was living badly because I had some very beautiful memories.

Now that my parents have moved to my house, theirs is falling down. So, to know that the little house where I lived all my twenty years is falling over is a shame. But they are very happy to be in my house, along with my sister.

Pilar recognizes the new status and security that her house affords her and her family. They have a safe, comfortable, large place to live and she has guaranteed housing when she returns to Ecuador someday. Because the house is alongside the road, there is even the possibility of opening up a business in the front room. Her sister’s sewing room downstairs offers economic prospect as well. The new house is a source of opportunity and a form of mitigating risk and providing some assurance for the future. But at the same time, the old house, the one in which Pilar happily remembers her childhood, is falling down. Although the new house may bring Pilar and her family great happiness, it is at the cost of the old house, of the old family structure in which she and her family were all together under one roof.

PRESENTS AND PARTIES

Parties and gifts are less concrete manifestations of status and wealth, but not less important. Migrants often give presents to their family and neighbors, throw parties and enjoy their disposable income during return visits. As community members who have sacrificed to support their families and who are now returning after years abroad, Pilar and Isabel often had parties when they returned home. Their presence alone warranted a celebration - even more so when there was a wedding, birthday or other holiday involved\(^{10}\). For example, in December of 2011, Pilar went back to Ecuador to marry her husband. He is from a village about ten minutes away, and they both wanted to be married near their families. I attended the wedding with my

\(^{10}\) For more on this see Casas 2011
family because my parents were the padrinos of the ceremony. The wedding was unlike other
weddings in the village in size, scale and style. For days before the event, there were at least five
women constantly working in the kitchen, preparing two pigs, twenty chickens, and peeling
many pounds of potatoes. The house had been transformed into a reception hall: the driveway
and small garden became a dance floor of woodchips, and a large, white tent covered the area.

The style of her wedding also indicated her sense of cultural preferences and new cultural
capital. Pilar often speaks about herself as a more “cosmopolitan” and educated woman because
she has lived in Spain, and her wedding reflected that self-image. A few days before the
wedding, Pilar had traveled all the way to Cuenca, about eight hours away, to buy the perfect
white wedding gown. She and her husband had ordered a four-layer wedding cake, covered in
white frosting with pink flowers and with two little figurines dancing on top. The wedding
featured a full set of bridesmaids and groomsmen, an unusual choice for a rural Ecuadorian
wedding. An MC officiated the party, and a live band played over a large speaker system that
could be heard from seven or eight houses down the road.

The day of the wedding featured a long procession to the church, a traditional Catholic
ceremony, and then another parade back to the house. About one hundred people attended her
wedding and dinner, indicating Pilar’s new status in the village. Her ability to afford to feed that
many people demonstrated the greater social status she had accrued as a result of having
migrated to Spain. In the evening, Pilar and her husband shared a first dance, then danced with
my parents, and then invited various attendees to make toasts on stage. In the style of some
American weddings, Pilar had designed several games and performances involving the
bridesmaids, other young women and the groomsmen. At various points in the night, Pilar would
call all young women to the stage (pulling me reluctantly from my seat) to play a guessing game.
She would think of a vegetable (or number, color or other object) and everyone would guess until someone chose the right answer. Her husband’s daughter, from a previous marriage, decided to help me and whispered the right answer in my ear. Unfortunately, winning meant a full performance of climbing onto the stage, pulling a garter up my thigh, and having one of her groomsmen slide it off. She continued the game until eight of the young women had used up her white, lacy garters.

What is illuminating about this experience was how bizarre these games were within the context of rural, highland Ecuador. The style of Pilar’s wedding was very imported, infused with foreign influences that mirrored weddings on Spanish telenovelas. After living in Spain, Pilar had seen plenty of television shows to have an idea of what a “cosmopolitan” wedding might include. Thus, her wedding combined features of traditional, highland weddings with the style of “cosmopolitan” Spanish and American weddings, all the while including a show of wealth and status by inviting many guests and serving an abundance of food. Consequently, by getting married in Ecuador, Pilar and her husband were able to enjoy the presence of their families, while also affirming their improved status as migrants.

In the case of the wedding, Pilar and her husband decided to return home specifically for that occasion. Similarly, the sisters also planned return visits around other important events in their lives. Trips to Ecuador often served as coping strategies for Pilar and Isabel during critical periods of transition. For example, Pilar cared for an elderly woman until 2009, when the woman died and Pilar found her job status uncertain. At the same time, she fell ill and ended up in the hospital. The combination of death, illness and precarious job status created a situation in which Pilar used a return trip as a coping strategy. She described the difficulties of that period:

I got sick and I remember that was the same day that she fell [the elderly woman]. She went to the hospital and I went to the
hospital. It was very, very hard. I was very scared...The mother died. And of course, I became very depressed. I wanted to return to Ecuador and I said, ‘I’m going.’ My bosses had to take care of the mother’s death. They said, ‘Okay, Pilar.’ In 2009 I left, never to return. I said I was leaving. My bosses said, ‘But buy a two-way ticket and if you come back, great, and if not, that’s fine. We’ll be waiting here.’ I said, ‘Okay.’ And I left with the plan to never return. I went for two and half months.

Pilar went home and stayed with her family for two and half months, trying to decide whether she would remain in Ecuador or return to Spain to work. Soon, however, she realized that she could not both stay in Ecuador and continue to support her family. She would have to choose. She explained:

I stayed about two months and I realized that the money there...well my mother didn’t have the money for food or anything. I gave my siblings money. So the money disappeared quickly. I was left without money. And I saw that finding work...I was able to find some, but I couldn’t make very much money. Finally, I decided to go back. I decided to return [to Spain].

Unable to save her money or find another job, Pilar realized that she would have to return to work in Spain. For women like Pilar and Isabel, a visit home also serves as a reminder of why they had left for Spain in the first place (and why they were obligated to continue there). On the one hand, these trips showed the sisters the fruits of their labor: they saw their homes built, Isabel’s daughter dressed in new clothing and sporting new school supplies, and their family eating better quality food and owning more consumer goods. On the other hand, these trips also showed Pilar and Isabel the imperative that they return to Spain in order to continue providing for their families. Over the course of a month or two, the money they had accumulated would rapidly disappear.

Thus, although visits allowed Pilar and Isabel to renew their social and familial ties and to see the results of their migration, each visit also made clear how greatly their family depended
upon their remittances. As they watched the money run out, and found limited employment opportunities for themselves in Ecuador, they reluctantly decided to return to Spain. Pilar described her first trip home:

We went for a month and it was very hard. You go very excited to see your family. And in my case, I was returning after five years and Isabel was returning after almost seven years. To see, above all my nephews and nieces...especially my niece...to see her grown up and bigger. Of course, it was very difficult to see them. You arrive for one month, but in between arriving and everything, the days pass very quickly. And you think about how you will have to return [to Spain]. You barely arrive and start thinking about how you have to go back. You suffer. It’s so hard to have to leave again. Of course, the first time you return, you see what you’re coming to, and how hard it is here [in Spain]. How hard it is to leave your family, how hard you have to work, and to be alone. Now you know that you are going back to a deep sadness. It’s worse than the first time, the first time you traveled and thought ‘What will my life be like, what will it be like there in Spain?’ I thought it was something alien. That it was going to be different, different people than those in Ecuador. I had such big ideas about what Spain would be like.

Then you come and see that everything is normal, that everyone is like you, just whiter and taller. Houses are the same, just a lot bigger. And more developed because they have the metro. That’s the only thing that changes, nothing else! Of course, you think that you are to return and you know what you’re returning to, so it’s really difficult. I cried and cried, wanting to throw myself out of the airplane, thinking ‘I won’t go.’

But still, I went [to Ecuador] and saw my house, which was more or less finished. It was such a great joy to see that in the five years I’d been away, I’d completed some of my goals and to know that my parents and my siblings were doing well. For me, it was a great happiness to know that my sacrifice and all my work are being shared with my parents and to know that I am giving them a brighter future so that they can live better too. So, for me that was a great happiness and it motivated me to return [to Spain] and continue working, to continue readying the house, installing light, water, doors and everything. To continue in Spain so that they could have a much better life. I returned and continued working and so did Isabel.
Return visits, like the building of a new house, let migrants get a glimpse of the way things used to be, with the recognition that life cannot be the same as before. They will never live in the old house again or live under the same family model. Return visits gave Pilar and Isabel a chance to experience being with their family again, living with their parents as daughters. At the same time, the visits revealed their new position within the family and their obligation to provide financially, which required that they return to Spain. The transnational family model subsumed the old, in which the parents made the decisions and provided for the children. Now it is a generational inversion in which the young daughters carry much of the financial burden for their family. Like the newly built house, the new family model has become the inescapable reality. Although they can see the old, when the family returns to feed the pigs each day, or those rare occasions when the daughters can come visit, they can never really return to that past. Thus, with change comes nostalgia and pain, present alongside the pride and joy of a new house and new status.

**FAMILY REUNIFICATION**

Today, Pilar, Isabel, Isabel’s daughter and both of their husbands live together in an apartment in Spain. But it was not always this way. When Isabel left her daughter at five months old, her parents took over the care giving. Don Tomás explained:

> Between me [and Doña Carmen] we cared for Isabel’s daughter. The first days and first months we suffered a lot because she cried at night. Especially during the first days because she didn’t have milk. That’s why she cried. And we cried too! [Laughing] Angrily I said, “Let’s give her to someone else.” [Laughing] Of course, she learned how to drink milk and then... [it was much easier].

From the age of five months until she turned seven, Isabel’s daughter had never met her mother in person. Instead, she grew up thinking of her grandparents as her parents, although she received gifts from her mother across the ocean. Her mother, a domestic worker, cared for
Spanish children. This series of relationships, between Isabel, her parents, her daughter and her employers, is part of what Arlie Hochschild called the “global care chain”. She defines it as “…a series of personal links between people across the globe based on paid or unpaid work for caring” (Hochschild 2000:131). The global care chain recognizes how the responsibility for care passes from women in industrial nations to migrant domestic workers and then to the women who care for the children left behind in the country of origin. As it descends the hierarchy of the care chain, the same care loses value (Anderson 2000, Parreñas 2011, Yeates 1999). In the economic market, the care that Doña Carmen gave to her granddaughter is not considered valuable. But emotionally and socially that care meant a great deal. It was also extremely significant that Isabel’s mother did not get to watch her daughter grow up. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas coined the term “diverted motherhood” to mean that domestic workers who are migrant mothers have to give up their own mothering in order to take care of the children they are paid to raise (Parreñas 2001).

Not only do mothers face the pain of separation from their children, but also grandparents, siblings and other caretakers deal with the loss when that child is reunified with their mother. Parreñas’ “diverted motherhood,” meant that Isabel was not separated forever; eventually she was able to assume her role as mother when she reunified with her daughter in 2012. Family reunification (and reconstruction) has occurred in phases over the past decade for both Isabel and Pilar. As sociologist Francesca Lagomarsino writes, families are changed by immigration, but also shaped by migration. Reunification with children, in particular, can be extremely complicated. The reunion is a time full of expectations and hopes, infused with guilt, disorientation and difficulty adjusting to life in Spain (2007:111). For Doña Carmen and Don
Tomás, the transition was extremely difficult. Don Tomás said, “We were sad when she left…she was almost like our own daughter. She never said abuelita, but mami.”

In fact, I arrived in Ecuador the month after Isabel took her daughter to Spain to live with her. For the next five months, whenever I visited the family, Doña Carmen would talk about how much she missed the girl. At night, instead of watching Isabel’s daughter do her homework, she would cry in front of the television. Eventually, she decided to have another granddaughter, only a few years older than Isabel’s daughter, come live with her and keep her company. This is the inequality of the global care chain, in which mothers are separated from their children and other caregivers face that same pain when their families undergo reunification processes.

Reunification is further complicated by the uneasy relationship between mother and child. As Lagomarsino wrote, reunification makes obvious the layers of expectations, guilt and complicated emotions. When Isabel brought her daughter to Spain in the summer of 2012, the feelings of joy, relief, and frustration all came to light. Isabel explained:

She [my daughter] has been here almost a year. For me, having her has been a relief. Not having her here and having my parents care for her, that was good. They took good care of her. She was in good hands. But I wanted to have her here. Now I feel calmer, even though she sometimes has her nonsense – like she doesn’t want to study or whatever it is. But it is what it is, she is my daughter and I have to put up with her. Now I am much happier and relaxed to know that she is here.

For her, it hasn’t been difficult. In the first week she cried and cried for “mi papi” and “mi mami”, because, in the end, they are her parents. I gave birth to her but they are her parents. I know that’s the truth. She missed them and she cried and everything. But now I see that she’s calmer. She likes it here. I don’t know if it’s that she likes going to school and coming home and not having to do anything like in Ecuador. Like working. She helped my mother to pick la yerba [grass] to give to the cows, to take care of the cuyes and to feed the pigs and everything else. Here she doesn’t have to do anything. She doesn’t have to do anything but study, go to high school and nothing else. Since everything was with meat,
rice, like my mother, she likes to make *coladas de morocho*. She also liked that. And there’s none of that here. So she doesn’t like that. But it’s good. I see that she’s doing well.

Reunification not only occurs between mothers and children, but also between couples. The reunification of couples is also complicated because they must redefine and renegotiate their roles within the light of the migration experience. Pilar and Isabel both experienced changes in their gender roles through their migrations. In regards to the family dynamic, they were no longer the younger daughters, but rather the key financial providers. Because they were the ones who could find employment, their positions in their families shifted. Importantly, their relationships in Spain changed as well. As global workers and “cosmopolitan” women, Pilar and Isabel knew the gender landscape was shifting and expected their relationships to be different from those they’d had in Ecuador. In a role-reversal of the caretaker role, Pilar’s husband watches Isabel’s daughter. Because both women work long hours and Isabel’s husband travels, Pilar’s husband is the adult in the apartment when Isabel’s daughter comes home from school. He helps her with her homework and cooks dinner.

Isabel’s relationship with her husband has changed as well. When they were together in Ecuador, he did not take responsibility for their child at first. Now he lives with his wife and daughter and is obligated to help provide for the household. However, this does not mean that they follow the male breadwinner model. Rather, Isabel remains the primary breadwinner and demanded an equalizing of gender roles when she brought him to Spain. She explained:

I think I have changed a lot, from being an innocent girl who came here without knowing anyone. I have matured a lot. With all the blows life gives, one matures a lot. *Se ve las cosas más allá de las narices*, [you see beyond your nose] as we say here. We see things more clearly. To be here, sitting and looking around, at everything there is. In this way I’ve noticed that I have matured a lot. To be stronger and harder. At first I was weak, very weak. I couldn’t do it. Like ‘I want to do it, but I can’t.’ And now I can. I say, ‘I have to do
it. I’m going to do it.’ I’m stronger at this. Also...I was more permissive. When I had recently married my husband he would tell me what to do. But now I say, ‘No, we are both equal. You also do it. I will do it too.’ Now I am tougher. My husband says that I didn’t do anything and he took advantage. He took advantage, saying, ‘You do this and that.’ As they say in Ecuador, men have to work and women have to take care of the house. No, no, no. Now he and I are equal. In this aspect I see that I’ve changed, especially compared to my sister [in Ecuador]. She is still like that. She lets her husband boss her around. I can see it from here. Now I am tougher and I say, ‘Look, I work here. I am here.’ I’m gotten tougher. It’s because personal relations change here. I have changed a lot. As I said before, before everyone told me what to do. But not anymore. Now I can also hold my own. In this way I’ve changed and I am stronger...I also give orders here. Here we both do what we have to do. Here I also have something to say in the house. My husband used to order me around. Not anymore. Now you do the work and I will too. I have a stronger character. I was...well, quiet, and I did everything. Now I am stronger with more character.

In recognizing their new family dynamics, their new status as the primary income-earners in their family, the sisters have sought more equalizing relationships between themselves and their husbands. As Isabel said, she expects her husband to help with the housework, because they are both equals, both workers outside the home. Just as their relationships with family in Ecuador have changed, so have the dynamics of the families they are building in Spain.
CHAPTER SIX

TO STAY OR TO RETURN?

But now I go there [Ecuador] and I see them [my parents] older, much older. Now I think, ‘My God, I haven’t lived with them and seen them and now it’s not the same.’ It’s not the same. Sometimes I have the wish to go and live with them. But I say, ‘No, no I can’t go do these things.’ Now I am married, I have a daughter and I have a husband. Now I can’t do that...because I have my family, my daughter, my husband, and my life made for me. I have to take care of them here, even though I want to see my parents.

- Isabel

Migration has changed the family structure. New family models that are increasingly centered in Spain have led to shifting ties of obligation and as Isabel says, “It’s not the same.” Family reunification has altered the way Pilar and Isabel think about family, remittances and duty because now they understand their primary relationships (to their husbands and to Isabel’s daughter) to be in Spain. Clearly, migration is an on-going process and this family’s migration project is far from over. As a transnational family, they are constantly making decisions about family structure, mobility and work. Part of living transnationally means contending with a long-term process of difficult decisions about family structure. Today Isabel and Pilar’s decision to remain in Spain is not so much due to their obligation to provide for their family in Ecuador, but rather due to their continued employment and ability to provide for their family in Spain. Despite the economic crisis that hit Spain in 2008, they are still working, earning more than they could if they were in Ecuador. With their family obligations increasingly centered in Spain, the women consider foremost the needs of their immediate family in Madrid. Will they be able to sustain their family in Madrid amid economic crisis? If they return to Ecuador, can they find employment that will continue to support them and their family? What can they do while in Spain to make their eventual return to Ecuador more successful?
Pilar and Isabel are extremely strategic when thinking about the future. They are prepared to return to Ecuador someday. They have intentionally developed new skills and maintained close relationships with family members in Ecuador because they have always imagined their future back home. With the economic crisis in Spain, a return to Ecuador would not only mean the opportunity to live with their family, but also an escape from the deteriorating situation in Spain. Just like their choice to migrate in 2000 and 2002, their decision to return to Ecuador would be a family strategy.

Of course, both women want to return to Ecuador no matter what. They agree that the end goal is their eventual return home. Thus, all the choices they make are based upon the foundational desire to move back to Ecuador and live with their family. For example, when Pilar built her home, she specifically sought land that faced main road. She built her home with wide, low windows that slide open on the first floor, making it possible for her to install a store in the front room of the house when she returns. Likewise, Pilar began to study nursing not only to increase her employment opportunities in Spain, but also in Ecuador. Now she knows that when she returns to Ecuador, she will return with a profession.

During her twelve years in Spain, Pilar has prepared for her future by taking advantage of the educational opportunities offered to her in Spain; opportunities that went far beyond what was available to her in Ecuador. She has received her GED, gotten her driver’s license and become a certified nurse. These education attainments are forms of capital that she can carry back to Ecuador when she returns. She recognizes the opportunities she has had in Spain:

On the one hand I don’t regret having left there even though you pay a very high price being away from your family. But today in this moment I am thirty-two years old, and I think this has been the best thing to happen in my life. The ten years I have lived here there have been setbacks and mistakes like I think happen to all human beings. But I took the positives of everything and I have
learned many things. First, to not be ignorant and to learn and to study. I am a person completely different to who I was when I came here ten years ago. I am another person who thinks differently. As people say, I speak differently, my voice has changed not because of my age but because of the years I have spent here in Spain.

Culturally I have grown, even though not in stature, because when I came here I was thinking that in Spain I would grow [laughing]. But culturally, yes. I have grown a lot. When I stop to think what my life would have been if I stayed in Ecuador…well it would not have been so easy. I probably would have gotten married very young, I would have been pregnant a lot and much more ignorant. I always had the use of reason and with the six of us, it was always my dream to work and be able to help my parents…

I know that if I had stayed in Ecuador, I wouldn’t have been able to give them a hand or to my siblings because being here I have helped everyone, no one is an exception; I have helped them all economically. I think there is a big difference between the Pilar who would have been if I had stayed in Ecuador and who I am. Today everything is good here, studying, learning, getting married here, meeting a good person. I know that to be in Ecuador I would have married a poor misfortunate and I would have lived in misfortune too. I think that it is the better life here, I have found something good here. I don’t regret and if I had to relive my life, knowing that I would relive what lived, I would, because this has been a very happy stage of my life to have married.

As Pilar describes, her migration to Spain has increased her cultural capital in the form of education, of how she speaks and how she interprets herself in the world. She considers her migration an opportunity for exposure to cosmopolitan city life. She also describes her migration to Spain as an opportunity to create her own family. Her marriage and her life with her sister and her niece have allowed her to construct and protect her own family in Spain. Her ability to reconstruct her family was crucial for developing her own sense of self and community. Beyond just surviving, Pilar and Isabel are also building community in their multinational neighborhood. They attend regular church services, they know their neighbors and Pilar’s husband plays in volleyball tournaments on the weekends. Isabel’s daughter is enrolled in public school, and
Pilar’s husband attends her parent-teacher conferences. They are not alone – there are over 400,000 Ecuadorians living in Spain all performing these citizenship practices that change the urban landscape of cities like Madrid\textsuperscript{11}.

Yet, with the Spanish crisis in 2008, and consistently high unemployment rates, life in Spain has been very difficult for Ecuadorian migrants. The overall unemployment rate is about 26%, but migrants face a higher unemployment rate at 36.6% (Burgen 2014). Pilar and Isabel have been able to manage the crisis by relying on each other and planning for their future strategically. Because they share an apartment and pool resources, the sisters and their husbands have survived economically. Likewise, as migrant domestic workers they have been able to keep their jobs in part because care work is always necessary. No matter how much a family’s salaries drop, they will always need someone to watch their children or care for elderly family members. Thus, Pilar and Isabel have experienced decreases in their salaries, but not complete job loss.

However, they feel the precariousness of their lives. If any one person in their apartment loses their job, then their situation will deteriorate. Thus, both women continually take stock of their present situation, all the while planning and preparing for their eventual return to Ecuador. For example, Pilar and her husband recognize that they are able to stay in Spain because of her salary and his pension. But if they lose her salary, then they will have to consider returning to Ecuador. In fact, when I conducted my fieldwork in Madrid in 2013, Pilar’s husband had been in Ecuador for several months. He was living with Pilar’s parents, trying to determine if it would be financially feasible for him and Pilar to return to live in Ecuador.

\textsuperscript{11} Estimates of the Ecuadorian population in Spain vary. According to the Spanish National Institute of Statistics about 240,000 Ecuadorians live in Spain, but most other sources indicate that 400,000 or more actually live in Spain. See Lagomarsino and Torre 2007, Herrera 2005 and El Universo 2014.
Pilar is thinking strategically when she says:

The women stay because there is still work in houses, even though it’s not well paid. For example, the Bolivians and the Paraguayans who arrive will work if it’s possible, for less than the law says they should get paid. So women can still get work, something the men cannot do. That’s why we women choose to continue working. Now it’s the same with my husband. He doesn’t have work right now and it’s okay because he has his pension and I am working. But right now, if he didn’t have his pension, we would not be here. I wouldn’t be able to stay in the house for much time because I don’t want to destroy my home [by dividing the family]. He is here, thanks to his pension and he wants to find work, but if I am ever without work, even with his pension, we couldn’t stay here. With his pension we have the apartment and we are fairly good economically. That’s why the men are returning [to Ecuador]. The men and the families with children because I imagine that being here with two or three children, with the woman working and the man not, it’s not possible to survive.

Just as Pilar and Isabel’s decisions to migrate were influenced by a need to manage the vulnerability of their families, so too are their decisions to stay in Spain or return to Ecuador. Transnational living is an on-going process in which families must find the best way to negotiate the instability of their lives. For Pilar and Isabel, that may mean remaining in Spain for the time being, while they still have employment. But if they lose their jobs, then they may decide, strategically, to return to Ecuador. Of course, they are also concerned with maintaining their familial relationships, especially those they have developed in Spain. Pilar says, “I wouldn’t be able to stay in the house for much time because I don’t want to destroy my home.” She means that she would not do live-in work again and send her husband to Ecuador because she does not want to risk the destruction of her relationship. Pilar recognizes both economic vulnerability and the risks inherent within shifting family structures. She is not willing to face the risk that separation would pose to her relationship with her husband, even if that means increasing economic vulnerability.
Similarly, Isabel has also made plans for her eventual return to Ecuador. She imagines that she and her husband will open a business together when they go back. Alternatively, they will use his familial networks in order to find employment. She explained:

Right now I am working. My husband is also working. He is far away from here, but he is working. But if my husband loses his job and doesn’t have anything or they lower my salary, we will return to Ecuador. I think we will try to open a panadería [bakery] because he knows how to make bread and I like it too. Or at least make bread to take to the shops. Also because my husband’s family works in a construction company and so he has the opportunity to work in one of those companies. And me, since I have worked for thirteen years, will be able to live like a queen. [Laughing] No, I say this to my husband. I don’t want to go back to work in Ecuador. I said this to him. Well, no, I wanted to do something because I would get bored, not doing things, and since here I’m accustomed to doing things here, never stopping, well, I would do something. My husband can work in the company with his father and his brother, his aunt. He has his uncles and his father and his brother and he can work in a company, making tunnels, building things, the highways, all of that. He can find more work than he can find here. Better there than here. And I can open a shop and work in the panadería.

Isabel understands that her family will be most secure if they remain in a situation that is still somewhat stable, in which both she and her husband are working. But, as she says, “...if my husband loses his job and doesn’t have anything or they lower my salary, we will return to Ecuador.” Like Pilar, Isabel recognizes that the option to return to Ecuador is a form of security. If their situation in Spain deteriorates (they lose their jobs), then they will return. Further, Isabel and her husband have thought about the skills that they will need to start over in Ecuador. Because they both worked in a bakery before migrating to Spain Isabel hopes that they may be able to start a business. She also trusts that they can rely on their familial and social networks to facilitate their potential return to Ecuador.
Pilar is especially well suited for an eventual move back to Ecuador because she has her education and professional training to support her. She is hopeful that she can find work as a nurse, but if not, her education and driver’s license would open other employment opportunities. Yet, even with those safety nets, she is still worried about her options in Spain and in Ecuador. Observing the economic crisis, her decreasing ability to save money and her increasing vulnerability in Spain, Pilar wonders if it is worth it to stay there. She explained:

Right now the situation in Spain doesn’t allow you to plan things like before. At the beginning you see Spain as full of work, full of options. So you decide that you would be stupid if you left because your future is here. But now, seeing the situation in Spain, it’s difficult to think that I will spend my whole life here. That’s difficult. So you think to yourself, I need to save money and get an idea about getting a business or something to do in Ecuador. And for that, you have to save money. And how do you save money? As a couple, logically for me later I would like to be alone with him and that would be a luxury. Now it is a luxury to be here with him in my apartment with my kitchen, my bathroom and everything. I’m not fighting with anyone, ‘Look, you haven’t cleaned this, you haven’t done this other thing...’ Just me. If it is dirty, well I don’t say anything, and I clean it.

If I have to be here a little more time, well I’ll stay. But yes, the key point and the definitive decision is to return to Ecuador. I know that yes, Spain has given me everything good that I have, but I would also like to return and enjoy being with my parents, my family, my culture and all the traditions there. So I don’t know. Of course, I have to return to Ecuador. After five years, or before, even better. But to stay here in Spain forever, man, if the circumstances of life require me to stay here, well...I’ll resign myself. But I really wouldn’t like that. If I could return to Ecuador, I’d go in a minute. So, that’s my idea for five years from now. We’ll wait and see what happens.

The choice to return to Ecuador is based in a need to minimize the risks of financial vulnerability and family disintegration while maximizing opportunities. It is also intimately related to the desire to be with their family, surrounded by their own culture and traditions. To return to Ecuador would mean new opportunities to rebuild family ties and reintegrate into their
community. As Pilar says, “…the key point and the definitive decision is to return to Ecuador.”

Before she migrated in 2002, she had planned to go to Spain and work for a year or two and then return home. Today, she still holds on to that eventual return to Ecuador, believing that at some point she will have saved enough money and developed her profession so that she can return with a sense of security.

Pilar and Isabel’s migration project is not over. It is on going, continuous, as they renegotiate and navigate shifting family structures, desires, and risks. Looking forward to the next five years, Pilar thinks about her situation with the crisis in Spain and her deep desire to return to Ecuador. As the crisis makes them vulnerable and Ecuador calls them home, Pilar sighs:

I would like to return. To be near my family would be everything. And to know that Ecuador is advancing is such a happiness and also that my family is superando [overcoming] little by little. It gives me peace to say, ‘Well, I have tried to help them and they are succeeding, all doing well in their work. And you have your profession.’ It makes you happy to know that when you return you will see them with work. You won’t have to be worried about what they have to eat, or that they don’t have food. Now I have a profession, a job and I feel peace. I can say ‘I have also arrived.’ To see my family well would be such a happiness for me. Starting with your family, with you house, that’s how Ecuador will superar. That gives me great joy.
APPENDIX A

MAPS

Map of Ecuador

Map of Spain

Source: geography.about.com
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