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“I Wish I Was a Bird To Fly Back and Forth:” Immigrant Women and Their Transnational Families Caring At a Distance

Sondra Cuban

Abstract

This case study of fifty women immigrants in Washington state focuses on the ingenious emotional strategies they engaged in with their left-behind families to care at a distance and the problematic ways the information and communication technology (ICTs) mediated these relationships across space and time. The study draws on a feminist transnational framework and an extended case method approach to understand the emotional dimensions and meanings of care by separated members and the ways the social technologies, and other factors, shaped these transnational spaces and interactions. The study utilizes ethnographic methods (interviews, informants, journals, focus groups, documentary analysis, and informal observations) and both a thematic and narrative analyses to glean patterns across the women’s experiences as well as unique qualities. The themes and narratives of the participants demonstrated that these ICT-mediated interactions contained “conundrums:” 1) ICTs enabled “communication chains” that were essential for women immigrants caring for their families but which did not resolve problems; 2) Transnational family who interacted more regularly and through multiple modalities experienced an “embodied social presence” that made the care, more real, from afar but didn’t resolve emotional tensions inherent in relationships; 3) The existence of ‘hidden emotions’ that resulted from the unacknowledged affective work of caring through ICTs; and, 4) the important roles mothers played as agents in their daughter’s migration.

Introduction: Setting the Scene

This paper examines the experiences of immigrant women communicating with their families across borders specifically for emotional care. The introduction focuses on setting the scene for my research and engages in the literature on transnational families with the ways women immigrants communicate with kin from afar through information and communications technologies (ICTs), that is, telecommunications devices such as phones and computers and the networks that support these in addition to platforms, such as social media. Next, I focus on the topic of emotional care and social technologies in separated families communicating within a long-distance “social field” (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Then, I explain my feminist transnational framework that focuses on the population and their practices. After which, I discuss the extended case method approach that informs the study approach and combines local with national and international levels and I bring in transnational methodology to look more closely at the practices that traverse these levels. With this, I discuss my ethnographic methods in terms of sampling, data collection and data analysis. Finally, I end with my findings and conclusions.

I start by describing the, “feminization of migration” and its connection to “transnational families” (Castles & Miller, 2010). Women become separated from their families when they migrate for better opportunities in higher-income countries, in this case, the U.S., which is a top destination country. In migrating, they reside in “distributed homes” around the world as part of a collective survival strategy: “separated from each other, yet hold[ing] together to create a feeling of collective

welfare and unity, which is called, “familyhood” (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2003, p. 3; Williams, Anderson, & Dourish 2008)—this is what is meant by the term, “transnational families.” The family is maintained through bonding ‘between and betwixt’ borders establishing both a new way of *being* and *belonging* as away-members (Grillo, 2007, p. 199; Levitt & Glick 2004). These family members, although living separately, help one another in a system of “global householding” through patch-working resources across borders (Morasoreau, Hoang & Yeoh, 2012), as one participant explained, “we support them more from *here*.” These families’ uses of ICTs to connect across borders is seen as a type of “glue” that keeps them together (Vertovec, 2004), especially because they are often immobilized by a number of factors---immigration policies, economics and geography-- that prevent them from physically seeing one another (Cuban, 2013).

It is immigrants’ pioneering technology adoption-- to find work, stay in touch, and send money to family that is promoted---as if the devices themselves are utopian panaceas for discrimination, separation, and distance¹. With this, immigrants are perceived as if they’re all one group, with the same backgrounds, habits, and reasons to stay connected. Importantly, this perspective doesn’t take into account gender. Women immigrants, in the transnational care research (Parrenas, 2005; Hondagnu-Sotelo, 1997) have consistently been found to remit more, doing so more regularly for those family left behind and they also feel more responsible for the care and communication from afar even over extended separated periods of time. Yet as I will show, not all women interact and care via ICTs with their away-families in the same way. I examine differences among women and their transnational communicative care through a case study in Washington, known as a “gateway” for both high and low-skilled immigrant populations (Kao, Vaquero, Goyette, 2013). While Washington has a progressive reputation, its inequalities remain hidden; for example, the state’s exploding low-level sectors that capture women immigrants’ labor and the ways these effect their socio-economic mobility but also their transnational relationships-- earning less money causes more strain both on the remitter and the family left behind.

Separated families interacting from afar to support and help one another do so in a “transnational space of care.” The main question for this paper is how this transnational space connects to emotion work. By “emotion work,” I start with, and then expand Hochschild’s (1979) definition. She characterized emotion work as the management of emotions between family and friends and which includes their expression and suppression with techniques ranging from the cognitive, to the bodily and emotional.² I extend her concept of emotion work to focus on “emotional care” (Cancian & Olicker, 2000) to be discussed in the next section, which sets a wider range of conditions and focuses heavily on the act of caring as one of affect. It also involves women’s agency (i.e., their creative handling of interactions) that went beyond “surface” or “deep acting” (Hochschild, 1983). However it was also part of their gendered responses to the “transnational division of family labor” (Schmalzbauer,

¹ See for example a recent article in *Marketplace Economy* called, “Cell Phones Bring New Leverage for Farm Workers” <http://www.marketplace.org/topics/economy/cellphones-bring-new-leverage-farm-workers>

² Hochschild (1979) distinguishes emotion work from “emotional labor” that is, regulating emotions for and in the workplace, and while these divisions blur for the population I studied, especially au pairs who lived in their workplaces, the relevance of looking at “emotion work” specifically, as a non-workplace construct is important for developing the care construct through ICTs for family.

2004) that was expected as part of their social reproductive unpaid work. Yet the caring they invested and engaged in was not just due to their feminized roles in their families, but also to the “new social order” with technology as pivotal to inequities inherent in the global economy, through its disciplining features (King, 2015). For example, the phones that the au pair sample in the study used to call and text their away-families were bought for them by their host family employers who depended on the participants to text and send pictures of their children, and by extension, controlled their movements. In this paper, and through a feminist materialist lens, I focus on the emotional care through ICTs that make these exchanges not just complex “blessings and burdens” as Jennifer Horst (2006) put it, but reflections of both stratification *and* agency of the conditions surrounding women immigrants and their separated families; their uses of these social technologies reproduced imbalances (i.e. managing household relations from afar as part of their gendered roles in society) at the same time that they found ways to use it resourcefully for their own benefit (developing for example, “missed call” systems). As “sentient” communicators (Hochschild, 2003, p. 77, 78, Tanner et al, 1996), they developed with their away-families new emotional vocabularies to deal with the distance (see also, Nussbaum, 2001; Lopez, 2007, McKay, 2007). Moreover, women’s engagements in emotional care from afar varied-- their interactions based heavily on their affordances, especially their access to multi-modal semiotic resources such as ICTs (Kress, 2010). These “affordances,” fueled by globalization and international migration, are often fetishized, feeding global consumerism and “network individualism” rather than communal values and democratic relations (Wellman, 2001; Francisco, 2015; Svasek, 2008). A sketch of two different women immigrants from the same country (Mexico) communicating with their families through ICTs demonstrates the complex emotional negotiations involved in caring at a distance.

A grandmother living in Oaxaca, who in caring for her ill father, expresses over a “public” phone (in someone’s house) to her daughter, a farmworker in rural Washington, that she cannot leave but wishes she could be a “bird to fly” there to see her never-before-seen 3-year old and 1 month old grand-daughters, and back again to her ailing father. Her daughter, Octavia, also wishes she could see and care for her parents and grandfather in the flesh but dares not due to the risk of being deported not to mention having such young children, and her and her husband missing berry picking and processing work. Neither can she see her mother virtually since she doesn’t own a computer or know how to use one, and besides, there is no Internet infrastructure near her, or her parent’s rural homes. Since no siblings are left in her parents’ village, all of them making the difficult journey over the border to join their older sister (Octavia), she feels responsible for her parents’ welfare and compensates monetarily for her absence and the vacuum of sibling caregivers to help them. She also calls her parents, albeit irregularly, when she has the money to purchase phone cards. When she needs one her husband notices and asks: “Are you thinking about your family?” To which she replies, “yes, I wish they were here and I’m worried about them. I want them here with us.” After getting her card and talking to them she passes on news of her parents to her sister who lives with her as well as other family in nearby Washington towns. Not only is the geographical distance hard for both her and her mother to bear, which becomes apparent when they speak, but it’s been a number of years since she left home and with time marching on she feels guilty for not seeing her even though her mother keeps hoping she will return and assures her daughter that she will travel to see her. Octavia feels:

very emotional and I have to fight off my tears but sometimes it gets to me. I try not to get sad so she doesn't get sad. But sometimes she wins when she says certain beautiful words and then she asks about my girls. We talk about that-- the emotions of being far away...she says, "don't be sad, one day I will be there with you. I will come to where you are."

Part of this feeling of “distanciation” (a stretching of social relations across time and space” (Kivisto 2008, p. 9) is also due to the complicated logistics of their communication, since her parents have to walk a long way, create a system of accessing a phone, plan a good time, and make a payment just to receive Octavia’s calls. At that moment of finally being able to talk, Octavia explains that she can tell her mother holds back her emotions to stave off her worries and both daughter and mother engage in a complicated set of emotion work from a distance. Octavia uses tacit knowledge, rather than linguistic signs to gauge her mother’s emotional landscape, knowing that a river of tears wouldn’t close the permanent divide of separation between them: *“and she feels things and it’s in her heart and chest because you can hear her breathe to speak but she isn’t going to let go of her emotions, so we don’t feel sad.”* This transnational space of care reflects the border of imposed distance between mother and daughter. Octavia never expected to leave home but had to due to dire circumstances in Oaxaca (with 17 people living in a one room house) and the hardships faced by her agricultural family, their separation being permanent. She knew her mother was never going to “fly” there to see her.

Meanwhile, 90 miles south, a former teacher turned janitor in a dense neighborhood in Seattle, Washington considers herself to be the family “operator” for her siblings living all over Washington, and her grown son and mother near Mexico City. Like Octavia she is the oldest of a large family of siblings, many of whom migrated to Washington State. Yet her situation is substantially different on many levels. Through mobile phones and computers on both sides, Ana’s family communicates news, sends money and pictures, and lends an ear. Through Facebook, Whatsapp, and by voice messaging, Ana can see and talk to her family on a daily basis. Her brother, who works at a reputable firm in Seattle, and Ana have helped their mother become a citizen and travel freely across the border, to see her children and grandchildren in Washington. Moreover, one friend in Seattle connected Ana to a Latino non-profit enabling her to tutor Spanish language literacy to newly arrived children from Mexico and she is considering retraining as a teacher or teaching assistant. Although Ana and her mother “never had a good relationship...it’s hard for us to be on the same page,” and they often yell at one another on the phone, she appreciates that her mother raised her son since age five because as a single woman, she had no childcare in the U.S. and had to bring him back to Mexico. On the other hand, Ana who hadn’t seen her son in eight years and calls him because she doesn’t want to be a “bad mother” feels that “he doesn’t treat me like his mother” the opposite of what her younger siblings treated her as, and Ana gets angry about the role reversals in her family. She goes on to explain the complicated interactions from afar, especially with her mother who confesses to her daughter that it is Ana who is, “like the mother.”

I don't share things in a deep way, just the surface. Why should I tell about my life if no one cares? One way or another it's my family. I do it [communicate]

to feel good. I know when I call my mother she doesn't care about me but I'm the communication medium between me and the rest of my family. Because of me she knows about everyone else. They don't call her... Everyone calls me for their problems. I give them advice and they don't understand. They say, "yes I'll do it." And they know I'm right. My nephews and cousins, everyone. I told my mother, "I am your daughter but I don't feel like it."

When Ana was last in Mexico, and as a way to come to terms with the tension between her son, her mother, and herself, they entered psychotherapy which enabled them to converse more authentically but even then, for Ana, there exists a cloud of emotional distance and frustration, as the anecdote illustrates. Unlike Octavia, Ana has constant and expressive interactions as well as temporary separations from her mother, and a voluntary type of distance between herself and her family. Yet even though she is literally connected through access to ICTs, she is emotionally more disconnected from her family than Octavia, who feels a deep emotional bond with her family but is literally more disconnected, engaging in conversations that could be cut off at any moment with her \$2 phone cards.

These two scenarios depict the complex lives and aspirations of today's women immigrants living in rural and urban areas of the world and dealing with global injustices that impact their livelihoods and those of their far-away families. Both women communicate with, and maintain bonds across borders as well as sustain their families within the U.S. through their caring interactions. Both women are resilient and use whatever resources they have to aspire towards greater economic and social mobility for themselves and their families. Although both are undocumented, one is less formally educated and has little access, or use of digital resources to communicate with her transnational family and the other can be considered highly skilled (as a former teacher) and "networked". Yet even with digital literacy, she has not yet been able to convert her qualifications to become a teacher in the U.S. and is marginalized. Still, she has established a "social presence" in a wider network of family and friends and, as such, leveraged her capabilities through her pioneering multimedia strategies. Importantly, both women struggle with their emotion work to maintain their familyhood from afar. While Octavia feels a deep sense of connection to tide her over between times that her and her mother aren't speaking, she is flooded with feelings when she hears her voice, with both of them working hard to keep these in check during their infrequent calls. On the other hand, Ana feels a sense of a constant emptiness and disconnection—only a "*semblance* of intimate family life" (Parrenas, 2005, p. 334) in spite of being able to fully connect and see and hear her mother through multiple electronic modalities. As these two women's experiences show, greater ICT use doesn't automatically translate to a greater sense of emotional "connection."³

Regardless, these women both established what Palackal (2011) calls 'virtual co-presence' (see also, Baldassar, 2007, 2008, 2012, 2015) in their relations with family members abroad, that is, through using ICTs to care for one another at a distance, they gained a sense of each member's existence as well as confirmed the

³ Rhacel Parrenas uses this term, "semblance" to focus on the care drain that occurs for left-behind children who do not have physical access to their immigrant mothers, with ICTs, viewed by her as second-hand substitutions for communication and with this downgraded intimacy.

relationship by communicating from afar. These interactions, as this and other research has shown, ranges from quick check-ins or deep talks, scripted conversations, often focusing on daily issues or coordinating activities, or alternatively, on crises (see also, Baldassar, 2007; Wilding, 2006; Thomas & Lim, 2011). Irrespective of the topic, the caring interactions have the effect of softening time but do not necessarily soften relations or make the distance and separation easier to withstand (Ling & Haddon, in Wilken 2012). The research has shown that ICTs mediate interactions (Madinou & Miller, 2012) but do not transform relationships. Even for immigrants like Ana, who have access to technology, they may literally have “connected relationships” (Wilding, 2006) but not the deep ones they desire. Even though family may interact more does not mean they are emotionally closer although it may indicate the strength of the tie itself—that is, they feel it is critical in and of itself to pick up the phone or send a message, and because they could (or couldn’t). Moreover, as Octavia’s case illustrates, a lack of means could make the communication itself difficult. Especially issues of affordability (which concern both reachability and resources) on both sides of the border; immigrants or those left behind might not be able to pay for broadband connections or have equipment, devices or platforms. Telephones in particular were used more often than the Internet, especially for some participants without access to other communication modes, and for the voice qualities of the “here and now.” At the same time, for those with digital literacy skills, texting was often considered more reliable and cheaper than cell or landline calls, and were used often for coordinating further contact and setting up free Skype calls (Madianou and Miller, 2012). In this study for example, due to the expense of calling the U.S. from home, family members left behind might call the participants through a “missed call” system, in which they would call and hang up to let the immigrant participant know it is urgent and to contact them. Or they might text before calling instead of leaving more expensive voice messages. However a number of women with low-digital literacy and English skills did not engage in texting. For example one Ethiopian woman only used her landline for calling abroad as well as with her teenage children who were out and about in Seattle, explaining: “No texting! I’m not good at spelling! I don’t text. I am ashamed of my English. The kids know me.”

Not only relationships and affordances, but location too, could be problematic in the sense that people use these social technologies in a ‘floating world of *absent presence*’ (Gergen 2002, p. 234), across time zones and places, but where geographic distance is not necessarily dissolved (Madiniaou & Miller, 2012). The participants and their transnational families established a middle ground, a virtual world, for meeting and they this did through ICTs, as if in one domicile. For the participants in this study, like the au pair sample, who interacted every day with transnational family, the ICTs acted as a type of “virtual home” (or a shared domain) because it was comfortable for them in a way they didn’t feel at home in the houses of the host family employers with whom they lived in Seattle and they could shape rituals in this electronic domestic space in ways they couldn’t in the places where they resided. This virtual domestic sphere allowed members to ‘feel and function as a family’ (Vertovec 2004), especially with continuous conversations. But not always. For family interacting virtually, it could feel like a “tug-o-where,” (Enriquez, 2011) in which members feel neither “here” nor “there” because they can be both places at the same time (Urry, 2000’ Hondagnu-Sotelo & Avila, 2003). They may feel torn between living in two or more worlds. Therefore this cyberspace is not, what Raelene Wilding

(2006) critiqued as, an “exotic new land” (132). Therefore, this research calls for an anthropological approach to researching ICT-based caring that incorporates place (Escobar, 2004). In the next section I will discuss in depth the ways that distance and separation do come into play when family are caring for one another from far away and through ICT-based communication.

Emotional Care and Social Technologies: Dealing With Distance and Separation

In its simplest terms “care at a distance constitutes practices that often last for longer periods, sometimes for years and even semi-permanently, and that tend to transform as a result of their protracted duration” (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012, p. 220). Although a myriad of care practices are involved (for example sending financial remittances or giving information), I highlight the ICT-based contact and the rituals around giving and receiving *emotional support and help* (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012; Levitt & Lambe, 2011). In this section, when I refer to “distance” I include the differences of geographic locations and time zones (so many miles away and across national borders), but I emphasize emotions and link these to family members’ degree of relatedness. This “relatedness” is based on the emotion work (such as attentiveness) that members put in to maintain the relationships and any outcomes associated with it, such as a sense of belonging, or, like in Ana’s case, a sense of exclusion (Liccoppe, 2004). In this sense, “distance” constitutes members’ shared understanding of the nature of the participant’s migration, and whether or not it was unpredicted and forced or expected and voluntary and the effect of this understanding on the relationship. Furthermore, members also have a shared understanding that the separation between them is either temporary or permanent and which also translates to the world of emotions. Resultantly, members may invest less or more emotionally depending on these circumstances and consciously or unconsciously achieve more or less “affective distance.” For example, the au pairs in this study were expected by their middle-class parents to leave the “nest” in their 20s in order to become more cosmopolitan and accrue cultural cache in the U.S. and they excitedly and warmly engaged with their parents who encouraged them to fly the roost, while some of the house cleaners never expected to leave their families, migration imposed on them as a necessity for the family’s collective survival. Many of their calls tended to be scripted to contain the complex emotions of being so far away and for so long and ended sadly for the loss of the physical relationships. Of these mothers who had left-behind children, or even elderly parents, they communicated with them as much as they could over the phone and in doing so, were, “mothering from a distance” (Parrenas, 2005), but they were not necessarily emotionally, “distant mothers” (Cuban, 2013), although they *could* be. Perhaps the most evocative sense of distance within transnational families is styled in Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*. Through symbols, she illustrates both a sense of brokenness and connection of family relationships especially during periods of not communicating---the protagonist reflects on something her sister told her:

She said that my umbilical cord was like a ribbon that connected me to Mami. She said, “it doesn’t matter that there’s distance between us now. That cord is there forever.”

In this book and in others, the ICT-based communication is viewed literally as a type of umbilical cord, what Lippocope (2004), calls, a “nurturing link” keeping separated families together, and it certainly is romanticized by sending countries who

export their citizens (Parrenas, 2005). Yet this link can just as easily be severed and may be more capricious, as Reyna learned soon after her mother left for, “al otra lado (the “other side”), not seeing her for many years. Members may experience moments rather than permanent states of “virtual intimacies (Wilding, 2006), depending on the quality of relatedness and the circumstances surround their distance and separation, but also logistical factors like full and reliable access to ICTs.

Going back to the definition of care though may be useful before concentrating too much on the distance and separation dimensions. Joan Tronto (in Fisher and Tronto 1990, p. 41) has done in-depth work on caring, defining it basically as:

as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

This inclusive definition of care enables researchers to highlight the “intimate labor” (Boris & Parennas, 2010, p.11) -- “touch, personal attention and closeness in face-to-face encounters” not to mention both the bodywork and emotional work involved (Twigg, 2012, others) in caring. Importantly it is gendered and labored: That is, care is considered to be “women’s work.” Without social protections, they absorb the risks associated with caring, the burden falling most heavily on women of color who are “forced to care” (Glenn, 2010). These feminist care researchers have emphasized the invisible and devalued labor involved in caring, whether paid or underpaid, and that it takes place in families, in society, and in the workplace, functioning as a socio-economic, political and historical material activity that is central. Moreover they have emphasized its neo-liberal qualities like the ways it has become a type of privatized transnational commodity in the global economy, sponsored and maintained by “regimes” including states, markets and cottage industries that recruit and exploit immigrant workers (Cuban, 2013; Yeates, 2012; Williamson, 2012; others). The literature has detailed the ways structural adjustment policies lead to cash-poor governments exporting their female labor force, who in return, financially remit to their families, but which contributes to an emotional “care drain” (Parrenas, 2005; Sassen, 1998).

Emotional care (Cancian & Oliker, 2000) focuses similarly on sets of practices that women develop that are highly gendered and contain critical vernacular rationales that are highly subjective, involve tacit knowledge, specific situations, changing needs, and cultural understandings, that are the opposite of bureaucratic rules of institutions that are more fixed (see also, Tanner et al, 1996). Cancian and Oliker (2000) discuss the ways families exchange care, within many different spheres, and through extended networks. A number of the women, like Octavia, grew up in rural and semi-rural areas at a time when caring relied on extended family, the kinship network centralizing the women’s caring as something that was integrated, positive, and important in the fabric of social life (see, Fisher & Tronto, 1990). Survival through collective helping was a norm. Because of this collective view of the self, many women may use interpersonal reasoning in their decision-making, prioritizing relationships (Norma Haan in Noddings, 1990, p.158). Emotional care, in particular, involves “close personal relationships in which the limits of close personal

interventions can easily become unclear” (Cancian & Oliker, p. 97). As Steven Lopez, finds people routinely change the emotional rules in order to care better⁴. The important aspect here is that emotional care is tied to women’s labor and material conditions. Whether paid or unpaid, most of the literature on caregiving however has focused exclusively on its direct and hands-on nature of physical health problems, for with the ways caregiving is used to manage older people’s symptoms (Baldassar, 2014). Furthermore caregiving is divided into various types (Tronto, 1993) with a focus on a giver and receiver rather than an exchange of care over space and time, through multiple parties. Furthermore, the focus on transnational care has been on the away-mother and left-behind child dyad. Part of this is due to the emphasis on the “global care chain” which will be taken up later in this paper.

Yet few of the ICT-based transnational communication studies of immigrants focus exclusively on their emotional work, or those of their families left behind. By transnational emotional work, through ICTs, I refer to the ways that women immigrants support their families from a distance and the ways their families emotionally support them. Zlatko Skrbis (2008) has found that emotional content dictates much of the transnational family relationships from afar, and that a sense of belonging is grounded in family members co-constructing emotional referents for familyhood. Pierette Hondagnu-Sotelo (1997) and then Rhacel Parrenas (2005) were the first researchers to focus on the emotional and communication issues inherent in transnational motherhood. Parrenas found that immigrant mothers experience ambivalence between their roles as breadwinners and nurturers but that they nonetheless engage with their children in a supportive role; their emotion work was engaged through managing of family life and micro-managing households from afar (see also, Madinioua & Miller, 2012). Raelene Wilding (2006) was one of the first researchers to devote an entire study to transnational communication and she highlighted the emotion work by transnational family members. In it she found that the ICT-based communication was not a “brave new world” but more like, “business as usual” (2006, 132), with sender and receiver “filling in absence by a sort of incantation” to ensure family membership and a sense of belonging. However it also had contradictory outcomes. Therefore, ICT-based care should neither be celebrated nor denigrated since so many factors are at play. This finding was echoed in my study for example with au pairs who often called their families as touchstones but which was problematic. Their constant contact with their biological families allowed them to remember their former selves and status as middle-class highly educated and professional women, rather than what they were in the U.S., domestic servants operating under a system of “false kinship” (Chuang, 2013). After all, they were misled by their recruiters, who promised them that they’d be “big sisters” to the children for whom they cared (Cox, 2006). As constantly as the au pairs spoke to their families, it did not remediate their problems. For example, one au pair complained to her mother that, “they feel I am their housekeeper.” Yet her mother could not help her to navigate the closed cultural system of the family with whom her daughter lived and worked.

Loretta Baldassar (2007, 2008, 2014) conducted the most in-depth ICT-based

⁴ Both Cancian & Oliker and Lopez ground their concepts of “emotional care” in professional settings and occupations, to distinguish it from physical types of care. I find it useful for describing transnational care through ICT-based communication.

study on transnational care that focused heavily on emotional support. She showed that transnational families distantly care for one another including providing personal support (hands-on caring through a surrogate or through visits), practical support (financial remittance) and emotional and moral support (listening, advice-giving), and these happen through a variety of means. She showed that manifestations of long-distance caregiving, such as “missing” and “longing” were important work family members engaged in, especially immigrants who were homesick—they try to “feel” their presence by staying in constant touch via ICTs. However, their ability to maintain their away-relationships depended on their affordances (capacities and access). This was the case of the urban-bred au pairs and other former professionals, like Ana, but not for the Oaxacan women, like Octavia who couldn’t afford regular transnational communication with their families. For participants like Octavia, they kept “transnational objects” on their walls, like photos that triggered a greater sense of presence of the other person, especially during times of no communication, and as time went by the memories became more fixed. Photos were appreciated but not considered treasured by Ana who traded these frequently online via social media and text based applications and which showed people changing and getting older. Baldassar (2014) also found that “crisis distant care” often happens between family members away from one another but that although, “virtual care [was] experienced as real care” it was predicated heavily on *visits* to the person in crisis (which demonstrates the importance of two family members embedded in a particular place). This finding confirms other studies (Mort & Roberts, 2011), showing that technology-based communication (“telecare”) surrounding care wrests on visitations. As Liccoppe (2004) describes, although these care relationships through electronic “mediated communication seem woven in a seamless web” it is important to note that it revolves around women managing the technology, that is, the logistics of caring through the ICTs (Parrenas, 2005, p. 103). Therefore, glamorized views of ICT-based “connected relationships” do not take into account how emotions filter through a sense of (dis)location, or, even, the emotion work of participants in establishing and maintaining a transnational and virtual space of care. Transnational care for women then, is often more ‘contingent and contradictory’ (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011, p. 5) and makes it more complicated to deliver at a distance and through ICTs.

Transnational Feminist Framework

This study uses a feminist transnational perspective (Levitt & Schiller, 2004; Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Menjivar, 2000; Hondagnu-Sotelo & Avila, 2003; Erel, 2007; Parrenas, 2001; Hochschild, 2000) on communication across borders, with women family members’ emotional care being central although often invisible in “transnationalism,” defined vaguely as, “the nature and function of border-crossing social networks, families and households, ethnic communities and associations” (Vertovec, 2007, p. 150). Engendering transnational migration (Boyle, 2002) highlights women immigrants’ lived experiences, including the communities in which they dwell, both virtual and proximal. This politics of location (and dislocation) encompasses the intimate, gendered, and racial, situation-specific care experiences and practices, as well as particular global forces, historical and current that engage their caring at a distance. For the participants in this study, they saw themselves as having multiple identities that stretched across borders, with tensions resulting from being pulled by their attachments in both home and host countries, their emotional caring being central. They appeared to use a number of strategies in trying to meet

their commitments in the U.S., including their paid and unpaid care, while also being bound to care expectations from those family members left behind. They may express strain at having to maintain everyday life and well being at a distance. One case illustrates strains associated with these conflicting attachments. One participant, Yolanda, explained:

My mother really wants me to come home.... my mother says one can survive and live in her town and it's hard but it's possible. We have to think about cars and schools and my mother understands why I chose it. But she reminds me it is doable. I want to see my mother but I can't.

This participant's mother, not having seen her daughter in some time always urges her to return and reassures her that living and working in "her" town is "doable." While understanding Yolanda's choice to leave, she, like many parents left behind, knows little about the life she has made in the U.S. and why exactly she stays. The reason for this is because while she tells her daughter everything about *her* life, Yolanda neglects to tell her about the hardships she faces in the U.S.—a consequence of extended time away and an unwillingness to emotionally burden her elderly mother. Yolanda had no intention of returning. Instead she had her mind on the car payments that tethered her and her husband to a potato factory job that was far away from their home but provided income for her mother left behind in addition to subsistence for her local family's survival. The schools her four young children attended in rural Washington anchored the family to their current surroundings and provided a sense of meaning for why she stayed. She said, "*my mother wants me to come home but I tell my mother I can't come home because the children need school and to get a better education.*" Similar to Yolanda, many of the parents with children in the U.S. concentrated their few resources on making social and economic investments for the next generation and therefore could afford little in-depth contact with their families abroad except for regular installments and phone calls to check on their remittances, welfare, and keep a sense of familyhood. Therefore Yolanda, like Octavia and other mothers with young children at home in the U.S., could be considered physically settled, attached to their "cars and schools," but just as emotionally conflicted about their attachments with those back home, and how to care at a distance effectively, knowing they would never return.

These immigrant women could be considered, "on the thresholds of belonging, between migration and settlement" (Fortier, 2000, p. 49). Transnational belonging refers to the cultural practices that keep the ties alive, caring being central. Levitt & Schiller (2007) assert that, "ways of belonging refer to practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group. These actions are not symbolic but concrete, visible actions." Peter Kivisto (2003) further highlights the importance of these transnational ties with particular practices of kinship groups engaging in the circulation of "goods, information and people" (p.11). In this case, it is, emotion work through ICT interactions which are shown to be an integral part of these cultural and communicative practices; an example is the way Yolanda keeps quiet about her life changes while focusing only on her mother's. Even the issues in transnational belonging do not often integrate gender issues and the care practices of women. Debora Upegui-Hernández (2011) has focused on the ways Latinas send money home as part of building welfare for their families and

communities from far away as “social citizens.” Women left behind and women immigrants rely on this method as part of a “feminization of survival” which governments also depend on especially by exporting their citizenry. In this study, nearly all of the participants at one time or another sent remittances regardless of their incomes and costs of living. Most of these remittances were not directly asked for, but were regularly sent and were mainly for medical and health purposes but also daily needs. In addition they sent gifts when they could, including those items that they knew were less accessible to their families left behind. In one case, a woman sent a gift box of baby items to Mexico, because the local Mexican store in rural Washington had a sale on postage, with most of these items produced near her family in Mexico, but which they could not afford. These “goods” and other financial remittances were viewed, by them, not only as financial obligations, or “emotional gift exchanges” (that are part of commodity chains of care) but also as ways to insert themselves emotionally into their families’ lives. Likewise, Denise McKay (2007) found in a landmark study, that her participants’ remittances could not be commoditized because, according to these women immigrants, “sending money shows feeling!” They remitted specifically to sustain emotional intimacy across their extended networks doing so on their own terms. By demonstrating immigrant women’s resiliency against a backdrop of normative models that prize familialism (proximate mothers), McKay “challenges prevailing ethnocentric assumptions of nuclear family forms and universal emotions that underpin care chains and similar dependency-driven models of migration.” In honing in on the basic characteristics of intimacy and emotions she shows that their fluidity can accommodate electronic modalities at a distance for family. These women carried a great degree of “emotional literacy” and they constructed the ways they wanted to relate to their families left behind in a way that is often hidden in the deficit-oriented transnational care literature. Focusing on the ways women assert their agency through simultaneously remitting and emotionally connecting at a distance doesn’t resolve the “gendered geographies of power” between left behind families and immigrant women but it does highlight their social locations and individual agency in a transnational space, as they care (Mahler & Pessar, 2003). What comes with this are inequities especially when the care that is rendered by women in transnational families becomes invisible through ICTs that are used in the private domestic sphere. This new focus on the public work of women in transnational care initiates a type of “radical geography” (Lawson, 2009) that moves the conversation in transnationalism from that of hypermobility to women’s “grounded attachments” (Blunt, 2007) within their local residences and how they negotiate their transnational family relations through embodied materialities of care. It also brings in a new emotional landscape---from loss to imagination---on family migration (Skrbs, 2008).

Methodology

The extended case method is an effective approach to developing a comprehensive view of immigrant stratification and agency across borders highlighting women’s care practices with their transnational families through ICTs, and its effects. This approach calls for critical reflexivity that brings in the researcher’s identit(ies). My experience of having extensive separations from my own family was important in understanding the subtleties and deeper meanings of transnational family relations and communication. As an “academic migrant” in England for nearly eight years, while not being subject to the exploitation in the

workplace and legal and societal discrimination that the participants in this study experienced, I did have problems connecting with my family from far away through ICTs. Skyping over the eight-hour time zone was particularly hard, for example, my daughter, in England was irritable in the late afternoon speaking to her father who was chirpy in the morning in the U.S. My ageing father who was losing his hearing also could not communicate well with her because she spoke quickly and sometimes in funny voices he couldn't grasp. In addition, I often lived emotionally, between two countries—when I woke up in England, I felt a loss at not being able to call family in the U.S. because it was too late. At night, I couldn't always reach them as they were in the middle of their day. In particular dealing with my mother's health crisis from far away and her unexpected and sudden death, brought to mind much of the loss and issues some of the participants in my study felt during periods of family crises, but also my identity as an "ideal migrant" --- good at both work and family--- shattered with my inability to directly help those loved ones in need. Although I was made to feel that a sense of place in a highly mobile world was dissolved through ICTs I began to realize that a "devolved" approach (Proctor, 2003) that highlights contexts was as important as a global worldview because this technological transnational space, could be, as I found first-hand, highly problematic. This "internal conversation" was important for me in analysing the research (Archer, 2010) and so I kept a research diary about the effects of my interviewing on me, reading transcripts, and coming to terms with the silences of my own story of being in a transnational family, caring at a distance and I dialogued about these issues with my informants in the study as well as the research team.

I therefore used the extended case method (Burawoy et al. 2000) because it situates participants' experiences in local, national and international contexts which seemed fitting to this research as well as triangulating informant perspectives with interviews and other sources of data so as to guide the dialogue "through a type of mapping of the social order" (Burawoy, 1998, pp. 5, 14)." This method importantly highlights disturbances in the system and links these to social processes: an example would be analysing the participants' responses to an obstructive immigration system that limited their horizons—for example the ways the J-1 visas confined one group (au pairs) to domestic service in the home and gave them limited options to participate in a "cultural exchange" while the housecleaners were stuck in low-level segregated occupations that did not provide a living wage for their families thereby restricting both their communication with their left-behind families and the amount of support they could give. The next step was to focus on the social forces (such economic problems in their home countries) that affected a whole families' livelihood and an analysis of the ways they saw their migration as a means of leveraging economic inequalities in their home country. In my study there were a significant amount of participants from Oaxaca and a hemorrhage of siblings from there emigrating to the U.S., causing permanent breaks in family relations---a decision that often created tension because visits were made impossible by punitive policies, leaving them to build their own surrogate families of co-ethnics who were in similar situations. In this case it would be critical to incorporate the structural adjustment policies as well as effects of the global recession and connect this to local conditions. The crosscurrent of forces laid the foundation for a multi-sited research approach in different areas of Washington State that enabled me to gain an understanding of the differing contexts that were unique to particular areas. For example the unaffordability of housing was very different for immigrants in Seattle vs. other areas

of the state like the semi-rural areas up north where it was easier for siblings to live near one another and share more resources. Although I did not conduct my research in other parts of the world, the transnational perspective incorporated the family members who were located there, and the issues they were contending with directly in their countries that impacted the experiences of the immigrant participants. Many times for example I heard stories about the ways that parents discussed the economic situations of where they lived and discouraged their adult children to not return.

In order to hone in on the specific issues of transnational families and emotional care at a distance that the extended case method missed, with its heavy focus on occupational and workplace institutions, I also incorporated a “transnational methodology” (Luova, 2011; Evergeti & Zontini, 2006; Heath, McGhee & Travena, 2011; Shinozaki, 2012; Amelina & Faist, 2012). This “spatial turn” allows for a micro-examination into the emotional cartographies of cross-border family life and unique practices of belonging. In doing so, it “denaturalizes” both the nationalistic view of families all living in one household and the methodologies that often occur in one country alone (Wimmer & Schiller, 2004). In this case, I incorporated into my research, the issues of the family members in the participants’ home countries, regardless of their level of contact because of the ways these influenced one another. It also opens up views of “transnational parenthood” rather than motherhood alone to consist of many different members and incorporates the ways ICTs affect the roles people play and their asymmetries of power. I also incorporated the care practices including histories of family communication and their choices for communicating care (Carling, Menjivar & Schmalzbauer 2012; Mirca & Madiniou, 2012). The transnational methodology approach led to a new view of transnationalism that was engendered and sensitized to women immigrants’ roles as caregivers, especially their emotional care. The interviews for example, were addressed in such a way to bring in meaning to the person’s roles and feelings about their families through talking about their communication and dealing with the emotions that came up. It brought up the women’s memories, biographies, and the deeper meaning of their lives at a time when they were so busy in their jobs that they had little space and time for reflecting on them. In nearly half of the interviews participants became deeply emotional discussing topics they said they normally did not consciously think about and space was made to deal with these feelings. This approach too, integrated an intersectional analysis that enabled a wider view than focusing women immigrants, as if they’re all alike. There were vast differences among the women in terms of their relations with their families and status in the U.S. with economics playing a big role. For example, a former industrial engineer from Mexico City turned au pair focused her energies on meeting Latinas with the same educational and class backgrounds from other countries and living in far-fetched Seattle neighborhoods than agricultural workers turned housecleaners living and working near her, originally from Oaxaca.

Sources and Sampling

The data are derived from snowball sampling of women immigrants that were participants in Latino community-based organizations (one in Seattle and the other in Everson), housing projects (one in Seattle for East Africans, and the other for Mexicans in Bellingham), the Seattle Public Library as well as community colleges and immigrant gatekeepers in Seattle. By sampling from different organizations and parts of Washington State it was possible to reach a large range of women whose social class backgrounds, even from the same country were different. Therefore, I was

able to get a fuller range of ICT-based family communication across borders, and the ways their lives in the U.S. affected their affordances.

In addition a representative sample would be important to reflect the current socio-demographic heterogeneity of immigrants in Washington State. Half of the participants (25) were born in Mexico, Mexican-Americans representing the majority minority in Washington (Brown & Lopez, 2013). There were also participants born in South America (Venezuela, Columbia, Chile, Peru), Central America (El Salvador, Honduras) as well as other parts of the world (Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia and China) who are also reflective of Washington’s immigrant makeup. The convergences too, of nationalities with particular occupations were represented---Columbians for example make up one of the highest au pair population in the U.S, and comprised the largest nationality of the au pairs in this study. The average age of the participants was early 30s, and they were a mix of single and married, with children, although noting that none of the au pairs (15 in all) had children and were almost all in their 20s. [INSERT A SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC GRID OF PARTICIPANTS with stars next to those I chose for narratives]. An analysis of their ICT practices were developed as well, to illustrate quantitatively and qualitatively how often, in what contexts, and what topics they discussed through ICTs and why they contacted one another [INSERT ICT GRID with stars for those with narratives].

There was sampling bias in favor of divorced and separated women among the housecleaners, in particular as one community organization had a class focused specifically on women’s issues and was at a time in the evening, when many of these women were available. As such, a large majority of these women were either single with the class fulfilling a type of surrogate role for them. They brought their children with them, as the organization provided childcare.

Data Collection

The study utilized interviews, focus groups, informants, and a research team to analyse the data in addition to documentary analysis, including emails, self-made movies, and an informant journal, as additional sources of data that deepened the case.⁵ Participants were given hour-long semi-structured interviews, all of which were recorded with a small percentage being transcribed. Aside from the au pairs, I interviewed most of the Latinas in Spanish, with the assistance of an interpreter. The use of a known interpreter who was Mexican-American and had traveled through Oaxaca and recruited many of these women in northern Washington enabled us to access them and there was an easy trust that formed in the beginning of the interview. She also provided me with additional background information on many of these women, or their families. All of these interviews in northern Washington were conducted in the participants’ homes which allowed me to gauge the contexts of their situations, and which appeared to make them comfortable. Their children often listened in the background and might elaborate on their mothers’ words. In Seattle, only one interview was conducted in the home of a participant. Apart from those participants (20) participating through Seattle-based organizations, the informants recruited through word of mouth and on Facebook and they were paid for this work.

⁵ Although informal observations were made of participants talking with their families abroad, and many interviews were conducted in homes of the participants, time will be taken in the summer period, 2015, to systematically observe transnational family caring through ICTs

The interview instrument was divided into several topics. The first was to gauge the participant's place in the family and about other family members, including their parents' occupations, where they were raised and biographical details about their lives including their education levels. No questions were asked about their legal status but one question in the instrument queried when was the last time they saw their families (indicating whether or not they were documented/undocumented although this was not reliable in all cases) and importantly, made no participants uncomfortable. This part of the interview also assessed their access to and use of ICT based equipment and resources. The major content consisted of ten questions focused on the meaning and effects of their cross-border emotional care, for example, "why is it important to communicate with your family in _____? And, "How are you and your family living here (EEUU) affected by issues of your family in your home country? What has changed both positively and negatively in your family since you've migrated and then linked questions, such as, "how does this affect your communication?" Many open-ended and follow-up questions were asked, such as: "what was it like for you to talk to her about _____?" After the interview was completed a "Context" section was completed after discussing the interview with the interpreter and then later with informants and the two research assistants.

In addition to interviews, three focus groups were conducted, two in Spanish and one in Aramaic in three different locations in Washington with women immigrants, on the topic of transnational communication and its meanings before the interviews commenced and during this period. These focus groups helped to determine the issues and refine the interview instrument as well as focus on issues and populations who would feel more comfortable speaking in a group. Another focus group with au pairs is scheduled for late Spring in order to follow up on interview responses.

Data Analysis

A thematic and narrative analytic approach was used to determine patterns across the women's experiences as well as unique qualities. A thematic analysis was undertaken (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006) to assess patterns across the fifty women's experiences and to understand their commonalities and differences with regard to their emotional care at a distance. The narratives provided a close-up look at the participants' experiences through their memories as they were constructed and reconstructed (Rosaldo, 1993). This approach focuses on agency and purpose with genre, moods, voice, story organization, and relationships in order to enhance the unique features women express in their own words and selected by the research. The words contained rich contexts and meanings. There were also silences that were important to note and which often spoke louder than words. Another aspect of narrativization is its incorporation of different dimensions of time, including the historical, chronological, and social, especially against rational timetables/schedules that do not incorporate "care-time" (Merriam, 1999; Elliot & Urry, 2010). Moreover, ICT usage can speed, compress, or stretch time, making interactions empty or full. Ten narratives were developed across participants with different backgrounds to reveal unique qualities of their experiences of exchanging emotional care with their transnational families (see star next to Socio-demographic and ICT grids as to who the participants identities and ICT-based use).

Findings

Theme 1: Communication Chains

Transnational families had “communication chains” that were essential for caring at a distance, but which did not resolve problems. These communication chains however were different than “chain migration,” which concentrates on migration decisions within people’s personal networks; although in many instances, participants and their family members recruited one another to migrate, the focus here is on passing on family news in the post-migration stage, within and across borders. This act was a form of “social insurance” to tell everyone that everything was OK (or not) on the other side and it provided a sense of “being” in the family. However it was not an insurance policy to the degree that it guaranteed safety, wellbeing and recovery of losses. The communication chains were evident during health crises and also for cultural transmission of traditions and family values, which made each member feel, as one participant explained, “to be united,” but also for transmitting *new* values. Passing on critical family information was a way for members to stay informed and (virtually) close-at-hand. During health crises family members depended on the news being delivered by a trusted member. I call these trusted members of family news and information, “operators.” An analysis of operators showed that they tended to be women, often, older siblings, on both sides of the border who had some available resources or had worked out ingenious systems of placing themselves in key informational roles so that members contacted them and/or responded to them first. They were also viewed as reliable. Although their social status in the family was solid, their own feelings about their role as operator could be conflicted; an example is Ana who had the resources to stay in touch with everyone in the family, passed on news and did far more, even though she felt her emotion work was unappreciated and, even with all her contact, did not ultimately resolve problems associated with the intimacy she so desired. With one entrusted member, families could consolidate and pass on important information from afar, knowing it would be received and accurate. Not only that, but, the practice of communicating this news, along with family remittances could save lives. For immigrant operators, those siblings left behind taking care of elderly parents were critical in terms of exchanging news about their parents’ health conditions. They also gave information to the operator about the contexts and conditions in which they were living, the effects of remittances and other issues. The operator could ask the parents whether or not they were eating and then check on this issue with their sibling caregiver. Yet the information from these siblings could be confusing if the health problem was unknown or irremediable, leaving the operator with few options for helping. One woman, whose brother in Mexico had an undiagnosed problem, felt frustrated in not being able to help, in part because her other brother and mother didn’t give her much information about him. Her sibling only responded to her questions briefly and superficially. She said: “I think that at best, if I could go and come back I would be able to talk to them both [her mother and her ill brother] and help the situation a bit.” In addition, her mother also had health complications, which the participant-operator felt made things all the worse, because she was not in communication with her mother’s doctor and wasn’t sure what exactly was the problem. She said: “the doctor told her [mother] that what she had wasn’t wasn’t going to help her so she told me not to send any more medicine...I can’t think about how hard it is for her, she can’t walk, it hurts her knee, it’s hard to get up.” For those left-behind operators, there were pressures to maintain

the family communication as well as a flow of care with questions if time had passed without hearing back from immigrant siblings, such as, “Why didn’t you call?” This could result in information exchanges that were tense due to the need for news and care.

In addition, the communication chains were also for cultural transmission of family traditions and values. Food recipes were exchanged as well as discussions of celebrations that were missed, being transmitted by the operators in the family to extended kin across and within borders. By continuing the family news and with this, the traditions, the participants could engage as a family member from far away, even if they felt like marginal participants. This helped them to feel less like “outsiders” or as many participants exclaimed, “I am an immigrant” marginalized in U.S. society. The communication chain also increased the family’s social remittances, that is, *new practices* (Goulbourne et al., 2010, p. 84; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011)—norms, capital, social identities and practices (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011, p. 3). Peggy Levitt (1998) focuses on the importance of *social* remittances in molding new family practices from afar and the ways that families, through passing on information about an innovation, can change family norms. This often happened for example in the case of separations or divorces where an operator might be the first contact point for the family and the rest of the members would process the issues either together or with their own families. This was especially the case for the rural families, where divorce and/or separation carried greater stigmas in their home countries. While migration studies research focuses on the ways immigration changes family norms from North to South, these types of changes flowed in both directions, and not just one-way. In this sense, this view challenges this *unidirectional* flow of care with its “calculative language” (Ramdas, 2015) in the “global care chains” literature (Hochschild, 2000). In addition, it brings in *multiple members*, especially adult parents who are backgrounded to the mother and child caregiving. The role of operators extending their influence and support (rather than surrogate caregivers who are seen as less than adequate substitutes for proximate mothers, brings in a new perspective of how families extend their influence across borders. Isaksen, et al (2008) have focused less on the concept of care “chains” (Hoschild’s 2000 notion of personal links of people across the globe based giving and receiving paid and unpaid care) and more on its foundations. The foundations may be called, “socio-emotional commons” which ground women’s care actions in a more open way than the closed chain links previously described. They define these “commons” as: “a community of give and take of which any individual is one small part.” In this case, the family operator is at the center of these commons---as “social citizens”---passing on news to family, within and across borders that is central to emotional caring. However, it is important to also see these operators, too, as responsabilized individuals bearing the burdens of global inequities, that is, the immigration policies that immobilize and separate families [Insert M’s narrative].

Theme 2: An Embodied Social Presence

Transnational family who interacted more regularly and through multiple modalities experienced a type of “embodied social presence” (Mennecke et al, 2014) that made the interactions seem more real, from afar but didn’t resolve distance or tensions inherent in the relationships. The in-built audio-visual dimensions enabled the parties to more easily establish cues than through phones, although not always, as Octavia’s

case shows---she could detect her mother's breathing as evidence of her withholding of emotions. The transparency of this cueing enabled each party to "care about" (demonstrate interest, attention and inquire about someone's problem) each other more easily as well as "care for" (providing direct help) (Tronto, 1993). For example a number of the participants and their families back home used webcams to show areas of their bodies that were hurt, healed or, showed strain, or, even more subtle issues, such as exhaustion in the eyes and face, that enabled the other party to have a clearer understanding of their problems. They could keep their webcams on and develop a type of continuous "transconnectivity" across borders (King, 2015). This enabled a responsiveness that kept each member in the present moment; in other words, it gave each person more of a sense of psychological immersion in the virtual care space. In a sense, they could have a sense of: "being there, being with another body, and having a feeling of self-presence" despite being so far away (Biocca, 1997). What's important though, is that it did not resolve emotional tensions that were pre-existing or had developed after the person or other family members migrated. In other words, a greater *social* presence did not necessarily lead to a greater *emotional* presence. This was because the expressive actions with family through heavy use of online communication appeared to weaken the density of their ties (Lin, 2001). This was most evident through the participants' and their families' uses of Facebook. It was easy for family networks to flow into friend networks on Facebook and for much of the communication to be in a similar vein with a similar tone of announcing events and posting news that was informational that actually *decreased* emotional involvement. Time after time the participants, who were in relationships that seemed to be dissolving, or significantly weakening, ended up on Facebook, with the intention only to share photographs, check in, and make announcements. One participant complained that her family was often too busy to talk to her, with the only way to communicate through a one-way stream of events, celebrations, and basic news about the family on Facebook. In one case a participant, Alana, claimed that Facebook was responsible for the dissolution of a relationship:

Before Facebook everything was fine. When I got on Facebook I got excited for them to know where I was and took pictures of myself. Then one day, I was aggrieved on Facebook. On my wall, she said, "all I care about is money and that's why I came here," and I don't remember what else but I cried all day. And then my sister said "how impulsive you are" and agreed that she was mean on Facebook. She was going to explain in private not public. Because my sister knew I didn't know Facebook. She is a really busy woman, so the communication is just LIKES on Facebook. When I want to talk to her she is so busy at her office. She says, "I am busy I will call back" and she never calls me back.

Facebook family communication was only appreciated if it revolved around other modes of communication, including phone calls, texts, or emails and on its own felt empty (I have to admit I'm biased against Facebook so discovering this among the participants confirmed my own views of it). This effect of achieving an embodied social presence but not an emotional presence is evident in research showing that streaming Skype on webcam all day and all night long, as some transnational couples do, has been found to actually de-intensify emotional connections (King, 2015). One participant in the study pointed out that to relate to a family member in up close was much better and that, "it's just not the same to *know a picture*" while another

participant explained, “ I don’t like pictures. . . I like to hear their voices, not see them in computers. . . if a picture comes. I wish I were there. I don’t like to see my town.” These examples call into question the sense of loss family members feel and even more, the extent to which *emotional* care is effective from far away, even through a the full package of ICT modalities. [insert P’s narrative]

Theme 3: The Existence Of Hidden Emotions

There were hidden emotions involved in caregiving by family members through ICTs that were not always rewarded or reciprocated. These hidden emotions were often ones that participants couldn’t or didn’t always articulate but existed in the background of their narratives. These resulted from the difficulties of having to exert *extra* emotion work to care through ICTs to care for family. The ICTs required the participants to be engaged in more regular as well as intensive emotion work to make the intimacy and care robust, but which was not considered by them as, “work.” Instead it was considered the “hidden curriculum” of being in a transnational family. Unpaid work that is done in a wage economy, which is not “counted”, has been normalized in society to the extent that it usurps so many daily activities. This hidden labor for the general public now includes everything from checking out groceries to commuting to work—making it more of a no-service economy than one of “self-service” or, public service---the burden of work being passed on to individuals (Lambert, 2011). It is additional work for those like the immigrants in the study, who lack many individual resources and were “outsiders” (that made asking for help even more difficult) and so they had to rely on themselves. For many women participants who lived outside of Seattle, because it was too expensive, they had to commute, taking much energy, time and money. One woman took the bus to check daily on housecleaning jobs which she never knew were available or not. Having said that, cleaning one’s house and care work to family, especially in countries without state support, has never been monetized for women. A new area of “work” is, “digital labor” because the public’s engagement with ICTs is an unpaid commodity within a digital capital society, although it is rarely considered to be “work.” In this study, the participants engaged their digital labor to care for their separated families at a distance through ICTs. Schotz (2012), in his book, *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory* focuses on the time and work people put in to Internet commercial and public providers that they are not getting paid for, but which ultimately benefits companies. The first and most obvious one is Facebook, and as previously discussed, many of the participants spent a lot of time on it. Also, as previously discussed, maintaining and managing family connections are done as part of women’s felt responsibility, which through ICT based practices, “amplifies local practices of what it means to be intimate” (Horth, 2012, p. 38). Jennifer Hjorth (2012, p. 38) reminds us that, “while domestic technologies can physically leave the home, they are still symbolic of sociocultural notions of what constitutes a household economy and the attendant forms of intimacy.” A number of women in the study felt that this intimacy work fell heavily on their shoulders and that picking up the phone or sending a message was a “need” as one participant exclaimed that they had to fulfill. Once they did, they were satisfied, with comments such as, “it makes me feel good to talk to them” and “I want to feel better knowing she is OK.” Through these social technologies they tried to replicate a ‘family dinner table’ sharing their intimate details at a distance as if they were sitting across from one another (Hjorth, 2012). However, what came with their heavier interactions and information were feelings of

helplessness in not being able to directly provide care, as in fact they were not directly across from one another, with comments such as, “I can hear or support her and can’t do anything” or, “I feel sometimes I can’t do anything if they need something.” These contradictory feelings surfaced among these “e-families” (Benitez, 2012) where caring and emotion work all took place via ICTs, with boundaries between work and home blurring. These hidden emotions surfaced in subtle ways. One of which was having access to technology put pressure on participants to communicate more often but which could strain relationships due precisely to their abilities to be in perpetual communication (Baldassar, 2008). The participants often called more than their families left behind as they were viewed as having the resources, and for those who had phones they carried them as if they were appendages as one participant exclaimed proudly, “I have my phone on me all the time.” In this way, these phones, as expressive as their capacity suggests, kept close to their bodies and easy to handle (Lasen, 2004), could also be “wireless leashes” increasing a sense of tension and ambivalence that were not verbally discussed. In many instances, family members *not* responding, or calling purposely at inconvenient times for the respondent was a means for dealing with emotions or situations that were awkward. One Somali participant described the emotion work involved in worrying, explaining, and monitoring time during her calls to family:

“Oh no,” they are calling with something. Maybe they need money. Even if they don’t need money sometimes you are at work and you can’t [pick up]. It’s 9 hours ahead. I call on my break and I wait and call them. They need help and plus. Not something bad, but you have to look at the phone, and the time, and it’s not fun. It’s long distance and you never know what they want. When they “miss call” they need something. Most times it’s money. Yea sometimes I don’t have it. They understand. Because I’m working and they know how hard it is. They think we have money no matter how hard I work. “You’re better than us,” they think that.

For those who had available ICTs on one end, they had to teach their families to operate these from another part of the world; for example teaching parents who weren’t digitally savvy to download applications. This involved considerable emotion work especially patience on the part of the immigrant, but also of the parents. Additionally, a sense of alienation could result if the interactions were delayed, premature or misunderstood on either end, as both Alana and Ana’s cases demonstrated (see, Ling & Campbell, 2012). Lastly with the loss of sight or hearing or hand problems, family members could go from “sunny days” on ICTs to a state of bleakness when communication was disrupted (Wilding 2006). In this case, each party exerted *more* digital labor not only to emotionally care, but also to create a sense of “digital citizenship” within the family. Yet the members who were engaged the most discounted their labor, and instead of feeling like “net slaves” they tended to see the “internet as magic” (Francisco, 2015) for its connective properties across the miles—not surprising with the discourse of creativity and appreciation that surrounds the political economy of this technology (King, 2010; Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013). What’s important is that although ICTs have been dubbed as, “affective technologies” (see, Silva, 2012), in fact it is the emotional displays performed *by the participants*--- in other words, their electronic emotion *work*--- that make these ICT devices—phones and computers work. In emphasizing the machines, the social agents who maintain them exist in the hidden depths. [insert C’s case]

Theme 4: The Important Roles of Left Behind Mothers

The “left behind mothers” in the study were active agents in the migration experience of their immigrant daughters regardless of the level and depth of their contact. Their mother-adult child relationship differed across the participants dramatically, as we’ve seen, but these mothers were not, what is commonly thought of as, “left-behind baggage” (Goulborne, et al., 2010; White, et al, 2011), on the receiving end of care. Most of the calls made to left-behind family members were usually directed to the participants’ mothers. This was because they were often implicated in their initial decisions to migrate, as one participant described: *“The situation is bad and tough...she supported me to come here.”* The participants felt that calling their mothers was very important to help them maintain their connection overall to their families, even if she was the only one with whom they spoke. The content of their conversations was often secondary: *“It’s more of the relationship and talk, just talk and share our week or whatever talk about our plans, what is happening in our lives.”* Another said: *“I call her two times a day using Facetime. I need it to talk to her.”* Talking everyday could become a yardstick of the relationship, like one participant who said: *“I talk to my mom every day, Email, are you okay, are you still there? If I do not communicate for a couple of days, ”mom are you alive, are you still there?”* They needed to keep family relations strong and by talking specifically to their mothers who were the centerpieces of the family (although not necessarily the operators), it made it more meaningful. Reversely, it was important for parents who were left-behind to provide long distance support to their adult children, especially those who were younger and single. One participant said, *“When I need support, they are always there. To make myself stronger, if I am having a hard time I know they are there and they will be there for me. I know they are far.* However, the communications at times left them feeling sad especially when there were celebrations that they could not attend, like one participant who said, *“If it is bad or good I feel sad I miss it, I am not there. Weddings, birthdays, lots of things.”* The mothers on the other hand, might tell their daughters everything or they might not divulge details, with sibling “operators” telling the participants more. For those without extensive ICT-based contact, mothers still played important roles, especially in sustaining their children’s settlement in the U.S. They may, as Yolanda and Octavia’s mothers suggested, return or visit, with daughter and mother knowing this would probably never happen---many of these being sentiments of love rather than actual plans. On the other hand, some mothers advised their daughters to settle in the U.S., knowing a separated existence was better in the long run for her and her children; one participant’s mother advised, *“don’t go to Mexico they say, “stay here [the U.S.]”* This also went for those au pairs whose mothers pushed them to migrate and supported them to stay in the U.S. during the year period to finish their “program.” Most of the transnational family research, as previously mentioned, is on left behind children, and the negative effects of away mothering on them, otherwise known as “care drain.” There is a scarcity of research on left-behind parents except for the ways the mothers of immigrants become less-than-adequate surrogate parents. Of the studies on left behind parents communicating with their immigrant adult children, they demonstrate a range of issues, from the ways ICTs are barriers to long distance care because of low digital literacy skills to the development of adult friendships and exchanging support. Although most of the mothers of the au pairs, often professionals themselves, had access to the Internet and communicated well on it, as Valerie’s case below will illustrate, for the housecleaners, their mothers were often in public places and had conversations that were overheard by others, and

generally, had restricted access to phones. Still, when they spoke, the mothers spent much time, whether with the au pairs whose charges were acting up, or, with their own grandchildren, advising their daughters what to do regarding childcare. One grandmother advised her daughter who was frustrated, “don’t spank them, be patient.” Mothers of au pairs would directly intervene, giving their daughters specific instructions or humoring them. In one case, the mother of a distressed au pair whose host parent employers only spent time with their 2-year old in the evenings watching TV, joked that her daughter should “steal the child” and return to her country so she could care for him. These mothers, from far away, would often see and talk to those children as well (through Skype) even more so than their own parents, so they were omnipresent. Importantly, these mothers, some elderly and others not, helped their daughters develop a type of “cruel optimism” which can be defined as, (Berlant, 2006, p. 21) “a relation of attachment to comprised conditions of possibility.” In this sense, the mothers were passing down important knowledge to their daughters as a way to help them deal with their disappointments and inspire them to work harder to improve their lives. With their left-behind parents’ support, the highly skilled women, like the au pairs, decided to invest more resources into their higher education. They did this as part of a gamble, because as they lost time in the U.S. au pairing and couldn’t necessarily return and recover their old jobs in their home countries or transfer their skills in childcare in the U.S., their best strategy they figured, was to obtain more education. In fact many of them used this term, “more” to characterize their building of their academic capital, yet without a way to recover the opportunity costs from their time out of the labor market. This was considered their “educational work” (Devos, 2014) that is the labor they put into receiving education as a way to belong to a new place of settlement and overcome gender discrimination in the global labor market (see also Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). But it was their emotional work too. In one example, a Mexican woman with a master’s degree in industrial engineering sought an additional master’s in business, with her parents sending nearly \$800/month to support her, only to discover she was not competitive and then followed her fiancée to another part of the country where she hoped to get her doctorate. She could not rely on her networks in Seattle, even her host-father employer who was an industrial engineer himself with no intention of networking her through his contacts. And it wasn’t just the left-behind mothers who did this but the immigrant mothers as well. One mother who was a participant, had a grown daughter in Honduras who was being abused by her partner, and contacted her constantly, to give advice and resources to help her escape from her situation. She was paying for her daughter to return to nursing school in Belize and ultimately hoped she could aspire to being a professional in a way that she herself could not. For those participants with children in the U.S., who could see their own opportunities dimming the longer they stayed, they focused on their children’s schooling in their local communities, with the promise of building their human capital for the entire family. One example is a Mexican mother living in a housing project who spent her weekends managing the shuttling around of her teenage daughters to sports events so as to keep them busy and stave off bad influences at school and she relied on the help of her co-ethnic neighbors, spouse, and siblings to provide transportation and support. For those mothers whose daughter au pairs were suffering in homes of “host mothers” they initially entrusted them to, they helped them to keep their eyes on the prize. They instilled in their daughters the value of persistence, as young women needing coping strategies to deal with disappointments, that is, “what happens, what we feel, when

something we expect, intend, or hope for or desire does not materialise“ (Craib, 2006 in Grindel, 2014). This issue is illuminated in the case of Valerie.

Valerie was a new au pair to Seattle and Skyped her mother in Mexico City on a daily basis. She spoke softly because her room was next to the children's. When the domestic honeymoon ended in Valerie's household/workplace, her mother advised her: "It's a job. It's not like you're going to have fun. You have to deal with them. *Think like a job.*" Although Valerie was using this experience to leverage her career opportunities in Mexico, "thinking like a job" was the furthest from her mind when she first set foot in the U.S. as an au pair. She believed the definition of an "au pair" which means to be, "on par" (an equal), exchanging cultural practices between herself and her host family and being able to study and learn new things. Her mother pushed her to enter the program because her friend's daughter was doing it, and told her "it will be a great experience" because it would allow you to "be independent and travel, it'll be useful." She also thought it would be a safe bet for her 23 year old daughter who never left home before because she would be with a surrogate family. Yet Valerie's calls home to her mother built a type of virtual safety net, enabling her to stay for the full year when she wanted to leave. Her mother literally kept her there. [More on V's case]

Conclusion

This study focuses on the ways that family separation calls for women's emotion work, which reflects both their social reproductive labor and capital accumulation, that is, the economic migration that started the chain of events. Like one participant said, "If I had a job in Mexico, I wouldn't do it." Due to their status after migrating, most of the participants were immobilized and had no other option than to use ICTs to connect to their families and make these relations work from afar. Their emotion work at a distance through technological means brings in a feminist material lens to the problem, that is, women's living conditions and resources and the subsequent "knowledges gleaned from the hand, brain, and heart (Rose, 2004 in Weeks, 2007, Hird, 2009) that surround their engagement with family through ICTs. The turn to material feminism situates women's social practices in their everyday lives with both structure and agency to frame their lived experiences and in this case, the ways the care is embodied in their concrete ICT-based care practices. (Jackson, 2001). Their practices also connect to "the feminization of poverty" in terms of the ways their economic migration has produced this emotion work from afar through ICT-based care and importantly, in terms of variation, whether or not they had full affordances to use these in the first place (see, Sassen, 1996). As we saw, some of the women could afford to place calls, text, and email information and pass on family news to away-members quickly, spontaneously, and on a regular basis, thereby enabling emotional care to flow in many directions and contexts over time, while others struggled to access these technologies. Yet the degree to which these technologies mediated the members' relatedness was weak, as even those who could afford to communicate more frequently found themselves at times feeling empty and not able to "be" in the family or establish the levels of intimacy in ways they had hoped. I have argued that emotional care *can and does* occur through virtual means, rather than only through the proximal, but that the "geography of care"---- that is the spaces and places, where people are and when, make a difference in how care is understood (see also, Parrenas, 2012; Ramdas, 2015). Although the global care chain literature also situates "place" as key in terms of where mothers and children are located (North for the immigrant

and South for the family left behind) within the global economy and the global politics of away-familyhood (Parrenas, 2012), it tends to create hierarchies of place in addition to commodifying both care and emotions, losing individual and cultural contexts (Raghuram, 2012) as well as meanings of the relationships; examples are the contexts for the “communication chains” I witnessed and its value among family members, depending on where they were, in addition to the virtual communities of practice that formed around this news. In this way it is possible to “map out the topographies of care” in geographic scales (Raghuram, 2012), for example the ways the au pairs were able to engage in care with their families abroad, as highly mobile women who felt “homeless” in the big houses they resided in, with technological affordances, and the differences between their practices and those of the more settled housecleaners and their relations with their families abroad through more limited means. Therefore feminist notions of practices and the contexts of care is important (Thien & Hanlon, 2009; Parrenas, 2012).

The processes too, are critical, as I have shown, with the micro-care patterns among separated family members, highlighting the immigrant women participants’ ICT-based communication (due mainly to methodological issues---that is they are in Washington where I live) but also of those who are left behind. I have shown, unlike the global care chain literature, that there exists a resilience and ingenuity of strategies of mobilizing care by members back home that demonstrates their active participation in the migration experience and that their care is highly valued, and this existed for both the high-skilled and low-skilled immigrants alike; compare for example Octavia and Valerie’s relationships with their mothers, and how their emotional care unfolded over their conversations. They both had, what Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2010) calls, “status obligations” –their shared understandings of the social order, born within their communities, and subsequent actions—to and for one other, immigrant daughter to left-behind mother and the reverse. However these obligatory exchanges were wide-ranging and reflected the varied levels and types of emotional care, including their own needs for care and that it could be oppressive or fulfilling or somewhere in-between. I have also shown that local contexts, particularly the co-ethnic immigrant women who lived among one another in the housing projects supported each another and that these relationships also mediated the migration experience, enabling them to share resources and thereby communicate more often with their away-families. It was clear that the participants had formed support networks for distributing emotional and material care to each other and, then, to family across their distributed homes. These networks are often perceived as *destabilizing* to blood kin abroad rather than setting foundations for developing transnational family ties. [More on conclusion].

References [to be inserted]

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