

The London School of Economics and Political Science

**The everyday moralities of migrant women: Life and labour of Latin
American domestic and sex workers in London.**

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For the women who shared their stories with me. For those women who keep on fighting for their dreams and for those whose lives ended too soon. For the *guerreras*.

Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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Abstract

This thesis is about women migrants from different countries of Latin America who earn a living as domestic and sex workers in London. Fleeing their respective economic and social crises, these women, middle-class in their home countries, experience a variety of personal dislocations when working in London's care service sector market that make them feel as though they have been transformed into "different people". These temporal and personal estrangements derive from the everyday challenges they face as intimate labourers, their undocumented status and the inevitable experience of illegality, the downward status mobility they experience, and the uncertainties they feel towards the future.

Exploring migrants' narratives of their journeys to the UK, the thesis exposes both the personal predicaments and structural problems that "pushed" them to migrate, as well as recounting and analysing their everyday lives as intimate labourers, the complexities that emerge from the commodification of intimacy and the tactics they use to negotiate the conflicts (both personal and work related) that emerge from such occupations. Following their working lives, the thesis analyses their ways of recuperating the social status they think they have lost, and of constructing spaces of temporary "normality". These choices allow them to "reconstruct their persons" while also reflecting on the limited options they have as intimate migrant labourers in London.

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Chapter One

Introduction

It was a cold and wet day in December when I arrived at Sabrina's flat in Canary Wharf. It was one of my regular visits to the flat where she had lived and worked as a sex worker for the last two years. After waiting for half an hour downstairs in the lobby of the building, I eventually went upstairs to the flat. Sabrina opened the door. She was wearing her usual pink fluffy dressing gown that covered her nudity. As usual, she received me with a hug and a smile. Sabrina had a particular way of always making me feel welcome. I guess it was her quirky smile, sparkly eyes and unfeigned attitude towards me that made me feel so close to her. Sabrina's flat was a cosy two-bedroom flat with a lounge that had two big white sofas and a TV. Although Sabrina did not live for long in any of the flats in which she worked, she managed to make her working space a home. The flat, except for the bedroom that functioned as her working space, was full of her things. It was not only her laptop on the table which was always turned on in case Alex (her son) was connected to Skype. It was also her cigarettes on the table, the bottle of water, nail polish and her sportswear all over the sofas. She offered me some coffee while she was telling me about the last client she had seen. Although she complained about being tired, she liked to talk about her job in order to make some sense of the craziness she was going through, as she always said. Talking to me about her life as a sex worker in London gave her some perspective and distance whenever she felt she could not do it anymore. 'Sometimes I feel this is like a dream and I think I will wake up and everything will go back to normal... where I am not a prostitute and I am with my son in Brazil,' she told me. She made coffee for us and asked me if I wanted a cigarette. We then moved to one of the windows that faced the street with our coffee, opened it and lit our cigarettes. We would smoke near the window, trying to blow the smoke out to the street with every exhalation. As we were both looking through the glass, Sabrina gestured towards a woman who was leaving the opposite building. 'She is a working girl as well, she told me, 'there is another flat in that building but she does not stay overnight, she works only during the day.' She continued the story by telling me how she once bumped into two girls who worked there by coincidence while coming back from the supermarket. She had overheard an accent that sounded

as though it was from the north east of Brazil. Her story continued as the figure of the woman slowly disappeared down the street in the drizzle. 'There are so many of us here, Ana, all these Brazilians, all these migrants coming to London: the land of opportunities,' she said with thick irony. She told me that they all came with the expectation of making good money, to experiment with a new place, learn English, provide for their families. 'You name it, there are so many different reasons, but we keep on coming and we end up being maids or whores.'

Sabrina is from Sao Paulo. She migrated to London in 2007, arriving with a suitcase and her 11-year-old son, Alex. Like many other migrant women, she envisioned London as the land of opportunity and the place where her son could have a better life. Aspiring to reach an upper middle-class lifestyle back in Brazil, she came prepared to work as a domestic worker, but after two years of struggling to earn enough money to live on – let alone send remittances back to Brazil, learn English or spend time with Alex – Sabrina decided to start working as a strip dancer in nightclubs. In only a few hours, she could earn at least twice as much as she earned as a domestic worker. Working as a stripper led her into prostitution and forced her to send Alex back to Brazil so she could have the time, space and privacy she needed to work as a sex worker.

Sabrina's migration enterprise became an extraordinary experience in which she found herself embodying different ways of being in the world. First of all, as a middle-class woman from Brazil, she experienced a steep decline in social status on arriving in London. For a woman with no English, no recognised educational qualifications, no relevant work experience and no legal status, the opportunities were few and far between. As a result, she was "pulled" into the so-called care work market in London, in this case working in domestic and sex work. Doing so exposed her to the consequences of engaging in an occupation that challenged her personal moral values, making her question, as she put it, 'who she really was.' All in all, Sabrina underwent a deep personal estrangement that changed who she was, and that required her to find coping mechanisms while in London. These coping mechanisms or practices were simultaneously used as a way to recuperate her past and invest in her future life back in Brazil.

Sabrina's story is an example of one of the many discussed in this thesis. As a migrant woman myself, I came to London to study the lives of one of the most recent migrant groups in London, middle-class Latin Americans. From the beginning of my research I knew I was interested in the lives of women in particular. My interest derived from the fact that, nowadays, more than ever before, middle-class women are becoming a fundamental part of the

international migration movement. Since the 1960s increasing numbers of women have become central actors in the flow of economic, social and emotional resources across borders, to the point that now approximately half of migrants in the world are women.¹ Yet it is not necessarily the increase in numbers that is important. It is rather the change in the ways in which women migrate and their relationship to wider global trends. Rather than migrating as family dependents, travelling with their husbands or male members of their families, women, single or married, young and old, are leaving their home countries with different personal aspirations and dreams.² The stories that I discuss in this thesis are the stories of middle-class women who migrated to London in order to construct a different future for themselves and/or their loved ones. Most of them initiated their migration journey alone, leaving family, friends and partners behind. None of them were quite sure about the direction their new lives would take in London, yet despite the uncertainty they ventured into new situations.

This thesis, then, looks at the intimate lives of women migrants from Latin America in London. It focuses on the experiences of women from various parts of Latin America, covering a number of different backgrounds, ages and legal statuses. All of these women worked ‘temporarily’ as domestic or sex workers while in London. Besides aiming to give a holistic account of women’s migration projects in relation to wider structural factors – both in the countries of origin and of destiny – this thesis is interested in providing the reader with a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which women underwent personal changes as a result of their migration. My informants talked about changes that affected their lives at various levels. Apart from the evident movement and the adaptation to the new place, women talked about changes on a more radical and deeper level. They talked about migration as a process in which they slowly reconstituted themselves as different persons. Even before migrating, women had engaged in fervent processes of imagination: construing their futures as part of the migration project and also themselves as different moral persons. Later, as a consequence of the different choices that women were required to make as part of their new lives in London, they claimed that they had, indeed, become different people.

Yet the existence of these ‘new persons’ was limited to the temporality of their individual migration projects. Sabrina thought of her life in London as a bounded moment. Domestic and

¹ http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_EN_Complete.pdf. Human Development Report. 2009. UNDP. Pp. 25.

² http://www.wunrn.com/news/2009/05_09/05_18_09/051809_feminization_files/Feminization%20of%20Migration-INSTRAW.pdf Feminisation of migration report. 2007. INSTRAW.

sex work represented a rupture in time that divided their persons. Sabrina, for example, thought of the old person she was before leaving home as similar to how she imagined the future. Both were different from her migrant self. Trapped in the present, this was bracketed in a constant struggle to deal with everyday conflicts, moral dilemmas and ethical choices.

Through the everyday experiences of women, this thesis looks at the construction of these temporary moral subjects who immersed in the changes brought by the circumstances of their working lives.

Migration Framework

Recent literature on migration within anthropology and other disciplines has given special attention to the study of women who cross borders and become part of the global chain of care. Migrant women are part of a worldwide trend in international migration in which people from developing countries are moving to more affluent countries to work in the service sector economy. Following the classic 'push-pull' explanation, it is said that women are 'pushed' due to structural inequalities at different levels in their countries and are 'pulled' by the opportunities that rich countries provide for migrant women. This theoretical framework of analysis has been explored under the rubric of the structural Marxist approach and dependency theory. In a nutshell this framework focuses its attention on the role of global structural inequalities as push factors for migrants without taking into account the individual's motivations (for examples of this approach see Frank, 1967; Meillassoux, 1981; Castles et al., 1984).³ In sharp contrast, the approach to migration motivated by neoclassical economics focuses on the self-interested rational individual and gives very little attention to broader structural economic forces that influence and constrain people's decisions to migrate⁴ (Kearney, 1986:335). However, reducing the phenomenon of female migration (in this case), to either a rational individual choice or to mere economic forces ignores the fact that, even where economic reasons are significant, those

³ Dependency theory analyses migration within the logics of exchange and exploitation of less developed regions (periphery or satellite) by rich imperialist countries (core or metropole). Seen in this light, migration is a feature of international inequality. Migrants are propelled by the dynamics of the world economic system and are seen as: "not active agents but as passive reactors manipulated by the world capitalist system" (Brettell, 2000:104).

⁴ Part of the concern with this approach is that push-pull models imply that individuals are pushed to migrate because of differential employment and earning opportunities in different regions and such models see migration as the result of the rational decision making of individuals based on their perceptions of these opportunities.

migrating are not necessarily always those in dire need.⁵ It also overlooks the fact that people sustain hopes and dreams within their migration projects that are not always entirely 'rational' or functional. Gardner (2001) has argued that we must transcend such dichotomies by analysing local responses to wider global processes, in order to explore how people organise experience. This thesis seeks to look at the economic dreams and aspirations that lie behind migration among a group of middle-class women, and examines the ways they motivate their projects and arrange and interpret what happens to them as a result.

Research on the experiences of individuals in their work destinations was initially done under the rubric of transnational migration. According to this way of framing the enquiry, migrants are those who, regardless of their individual motivations or structural 'push' factors, do not simply leave one social setting to go to another: the very process of crossing borders creates new social and cultural patterns, ideas and behaviours (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1992:ix; see also Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994). Anthropologists have generally studied the processes and effects of transnational migration that articulate the place migrants leave behind with the place they have entered. The concept of transnationalism has also been interpreted as a means to explore how migrants 'make sense' of the place to which they have come, and to study how they themselves undergo change in the process (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Its analysis focuses on how these changes are negotiated, lived and contested by migrants.⁶ This thesis establishes a dialogue with some of the questions raised by this body of literature, but also contributes an analysis of the articulation of gender with the migration process. Much has been written about the role of gender construction in the facilitation or constraining of women's and men's migration and settlement (Pedraza 1991, Ong 1991, Donato 1992, Brettel and Berjeois 1992, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Malher 1999, Pessar 2001, Gardner 2002, Hochschild 2002, Gardner, 2002). Many of these studies argue that individual migrants, even those from the same regions or countries, do not experience the places in which they live and work in a uniform manner; rather, these experiences are mediated through articulations of power at the global, national, social, and personal level. Gender, as well as class, is a key aspect of these articulations.

⁵ See Andrea Tyree and Katherine M. Donato. "A Demographic Overview of the International Migration of Women" in *International Migration: The Female Experience*.

⁶ See Mahler 2001 and Giles 2009 on place; Gardner 1995 and Levitt 2001 on the fashioning of the migrant person Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994, Ong 1993, Rouse 1992, Guarnizo 1997 for changes in social status and gender among migrant families.

Nonetheless, even within the framework offered by transnational migration, there has been little discussion of other reasons for people to migrate besides the classic ‘push-pull’ factors, or of how economic factors are embedded within broader social settings. Despite the advances made by theories of transnationalism, one is still given the impression that transnational migrants are trapped between global economic forces that determine where to move and under which conditions. Latin American migration to the UK is undoubtedly influenced by wider structural socio-economic forces, although migrants are not necessarily the poorest in their countries. Among my informants, poverty was rarely a reason to migrate. As I will explain, they defined themselves as middle-class people who made the choice to migrate because of their personal life situations in their countries. In those cases in which women were ‘pushed’ by economic reasons, these amounted to excessive levels of debt. These debts, as I shall demonstrate later on, were derived from a conjunction between their middle-class positions – and the aspirations that come with such positions – and the broad economic instability of their respective countries under post-structural adjustment austerity regimes. For others migration provided the possibility of accessing a different middle-class life style that would otherwise have been unavailable to them because of their relatively lowly social origins. Finally, there were those for whom migration represented an adventure that they hoped would change their lives. While acknowledging the difficulties in trying to avoid falling into a ‘push-pull’ explanation or a rational individual choice understanding of migration, I take both perspectives into account rather than jettisoning them. I hope to be able to offer a view of migration that considers the broader social structures that shape migration patterns without losing sight of the personal decision-making processes, which includes considering the motivations, goals, and aspirations, of those who migrate. I agree with Bourgois when he states that “ethnographic method allows the ‘pawns’ of larger structural forces to emerge as real human beings who shape their own futures” (2003:16). As my thesis focuses on middle-class women, my aim is to explore how women make sense of their new worlds, as middle-class people.

My thesis aims to provide an intimate view and understanding of Latin American women migrants in London who worked as domestic and sex workers. Certainly, attempting to tackle the study of women from different nationalities and social backgrounds could be seen as problematic. Yet, at the same time it allows us to examine the lives of these women as they adapt to the broader heterogenous social fabric of London, as Glick Schiller and Caglar have suggested (2009:184): This is part of the reason that the focus of this thesis is not an analysis of a group

from one specific national background, but rather of a group of women who happened to share the dream of coming to London and ended up working as domestic and sex workers. Although they do not share a nationality, ethnicity or in many cases social background, they all self-identified as middle class.⁷ They share similar problems, hopes and expectations. Above all, they came to share the feeling of having become a different person who, because of migration, work insecurity, illegal status, and uncertainty about the future, is required to negotiate their current choices in a constant dialogue between past and their future projects.

Being middle class

Much has been written about the emergence of a global middle class and the ways in which people assume and perform such class. As complicated as it may be to generalise about the common characteristics of this so-called middle class, most commentators agree that middle-class people appear to share similar expectations of a particular lifestyle grounded in certain values and patterns of consumption. They also appear to desire the status that is seen to accompany these traits (Caldeira 1996, O'Dougherty 2002, Raj 2003, Lietchy 2003, Cohen 2004, Donner and De Neve 2011, Dickey 2000, Olszewska 2013, James, forthcoming). As James (forthcoming) has suggested, across the world the identity of the middle class presents an in-between status. There is an upward identification whereby people, through different everyday practices, aspire to become culturally and socially middle class even if they do not seem to possess the material attributes or background which that implies. I follow this rationale, although I am aware of the difficulties with trying to construct generalisations, because all my informants self-identified as middle class. Moreover, when we look at Latin America, although strict demarcations may exist between classes in economic terms, “tens of millions of people identify themselves as middle class and live lives that most outside observers are comfortable calling the middle class” (Parker 2013:2).⁸ This is the case despite the fact that Latin America is one of the regions of the world where wealth is most unequally distributed (Parker 2013:1).

From a classic Marxist perspective there is no such thing as the middle class. That is, there

⁷ This does not mean that middle class meant the same for everyone.

⁸ Although according to Cardeans, Kharas and Henao, Latin America is not currently a middle-class region, it does have a relatively large middle class in comparison to China and India (2011:6).

are fundamentally two classes: the owners of the means of production and the workers. Thus, the study of the middle class poses a problem when we try to analyse class beyond labour, capital and histories of class struggle. The main peculiarity of the middle class is that it appears to be located in the middle of being either in control or being exploited, hence the slippery boundaries for a strict a definition and understanding of such a group. However, as Donner and De Neve (2011) suggest, while studying these groups ‘in the middle’ we must pay attention to the aspects that are located beyond capital/labour relations, that is, to status and its reproduction. In this regard, Weberian approaches provide the analytical tools to understand how class formation is also constructed around social mobility and life chances. Class understood through such an approach takes into account the role of education, occupation, social networks and a community’s relationship with the market as the means by which people construct their class identity.⁹ This approach has served to empirically study and define what has been widely addressed as the “new middle class” (Donner and De Neve 2011). A complementary approach that draws on Weber, Bourdieu’s (1984) work, views class as the embodiment of social formations, that is, part of bodily dispositions that people acquire throughout their lives (ie. *habitus*). His analysis shows how class identity does not necessarily depend on economic assets, but rather on the accumulation of different capitals (economic, social and cultural) that will inevitably reproduce inequality and social differentiation. As Donner and De Never note, “With regard to the middle class, Bourdieu’s work pushes three important points, namely the role of culture as a set of differentiated ‘tastes’ and socialisation as a set of consciously differentiating practices; the importance of everyday practices; and the different kinds of capital available to the middle classes” (Donner and De Never 2011:6). Following this lead, this thesis analyses social class as relational (see Wright 1997:27) and understands class as a group of people who share not only an economic position, but also a set of cultural practices and/or dispositions (consumption, ideological beliefs, morality, values, skills and other embodied attributes) that shape their class identity and notions of status. It looks at the everyday practices and discourses of those who self-identify as middle class and aims to show how people in the middle (or in-between) struggle to achieve a particular lifestyle, often finding themselves in contradictory positions with their own class identity *vis-á-vis* other classes. It also takes into account how people endow dispositions with value as status attributes that, as Olszewska has stated, “may be

⁹ From a Weberian point of view there are not only those in dominant positions and propertied groups, but also the petty bourgeoisie; workers with formal credentials (the middle class) and those who only have their labour power (the working class) (Breen, 2005:2-3).

used as chips in the high-stakes game of social mobility” (2013:2)., Specifically, this thesis examines the lives of women who considered themselves middle class in relation to their status (how others define them) and their own identity (how they define themselves). Both status and class identity derive, as Parker has noted in Latin America, from the perception that people are, by some measure, below the elite yet above the poor and working classes (Parker 2013:3). The definition of the so-called middle class in Latin America is “rarely defined just by occupation or income: skin colour, education, talents, lifestyle, last name, connections, even political loyalties are just as likely to enter the calculation” (Parker 2013: 2).¹⁰

The literature that has emerged from the study of the middle classes in Latin America is vast and encompasses theoretical analyses from different intellectual approaches. Scholarly interest in the Latin American middle classes emerged in the mid nineteenth-century, when the middle classes played an important role in defining new forms of citizenship as part of a criolisation project. There was, as French has suggested, a need to *crear gente culta* (create people with culture) who would promote and disseminate a particular western (as in European) morality (French 2013 [1966]). These ideals of a middle class were contested between the late 1940s and the mid-to-late 1960s, when some scholars started questioning the role of the middle classes as modernisers, promoters of democracy and allies with other classes on the grounds that they were conservative and reluctant to take risks (Wagley 2013 [1968], Benedetti 2013 [1947]). Others, however, retained an optimistic view of the middle classes as central to the attainment of democracy and development (Lopez Camara 2013 [1967]).

The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed a decrease in interest in the middle classes as many young scholars drew their inspiration from the revolutionaries of the mountains and the peasant working masses; the discussion then focused on the role of the working classes and the dispossessed, rather than on those in the middle and on the conservative ideologies with which they were associated. By the 1970s and 1980s, the literature focused largely on either the socio-political and institutional conditions that could help the reinstatement of democracy following military dictatorships, or on the effects of the market upon the precarity, flexibility of labour and the consequences of social exclusion and poverty. After the insertion and impact of neoliberal policies and structural adjustment programs, some claimed that the middle classes were doomed

¹⁰ Yet, historically speaking the definitions of the middle class have been changing according to the national context, notions of race and ethnicity as well as occupation (see de la Cadena 2000 and Parker 1998 for Peru, Telles 2004 and Andrews 1991 for Brazil).

to disappear as the economic crisis led to the “proletarianisation” of those who had once been the “new middle classes” (Parker 2013:2-4). This “new middle class” was now old and being replaced by a new ‘new’ middle class of self-employed entrepreneurs, large and small, who emerged in importing-exporting, computing, telecommunications and services” (Parker 2013:13).¹¹ The new “new” middle class enjoyed the opportunity not only to have access to consumer goods as never before, but also to improve their social prestige through education, although, from the 1990s onwards, university degrees no longer guaranteed a middle-income job as they once had done.¹² This new middle class was defined less by education and stable employment in the public sector and more by their income and possessions - “a class defined by a lifestyle” (Parker 2013:14). Overall, the different changes that Latin America has undergone in the twentieth century have engendered a middle class which is in constant production and reproduction through the lived experiences of social stratification in material and symbolic terms.¹³

It is within this complex historical and political context that the women described in this thesis identify themselves as middle class. This definition emerges from the fact that the women, first of all, defined themselves as middle class and justified their class identity in opposition to the lower classes, that is, the poor people of their respective countries. Despite the fact that the women might have held different positions within the wider middle class in their own countries (lower middle, middle middle, upper middle), they shared a common understanding of their middle-class identity based on the acquisition or a desire for a similar lifestyle. Home ownership, education, credentials, moral values, consumption and work were means through which they symbolically and materially attained and performed their class identity.

No matter which stereotype is closer to the truth, the sober, thrifty, industrious middle class or the status-obsessed middle class keeping up appearances while living beyond its means, lifestyle and

¹¹ The return of the “middle-class actor, as Hopenhayn (2010) calls it was due to the economic growth in the first half of the 90s that allowed for the re-emergence of the middle class.

¹² By the 1960s a university degree was what a high school diploma had been in the 1940s. Although by the 1990s a degree could not guarantee a middle-class job, education as Parker puts it, remained a value that distinguished the middle classes from others.

¹³ The complexity of class in Latin America is cross-cut by race/ethnicity. Although I do not intend to elaborate an analysis on the intersection between race/ethnicity and class in Latin America, I encounter some remainders of these quintessential ideologies among my informants. For many, their class identity and specially the class of other people, even though not explicit, was certainly linked to notions of race and ethnicity. Therefore their class identity as middle class was structured *vis-a-vis* other ethnic/racial groups (indigenous, blacks) who were classified as lower class.

consumption appear again and again as the defining profiles of those in the social middle (Parker 2013:5).

In many cases, it was precisely this striving for a specific middle-class ideal, morality and lifestyle that provoked situations of debt and hence 'pushed' women to migrate. These contradictions fed into an intensified assertion of their middle class status in London, despite their being forced into low-status occupations, and allowed them to position themselves vis-à-vis others, thereby cementing their own sense of their social status. However, as this thesis will explore, the contradictory and problematic lives that such women lived in London provoked a "status incongruence" (Lenski 1966:87 cited in Olszewska 2013:2), meaning "a state affecting those whose status or rank in one domain is inconsistent with how they are perceived in another" (Olszewska 2013:8). Women found their current occupations in domestic and/or sex work to be in complete contradiction to their previous occupations and lifestyle (*c.f.* Lindquist 2009). Both occupations implied a steep downward spiral for women who, in the past, had hired domestic workers and held moral values that clashed with both occupations (sex work in particular). As a result, women found themselves dispossessed of their original statuses and placed in contradictory class positions. Clinging to a self-perception of a higher status and class helped them cope with their current estrangements, but as I will show, it was often not enough to deal with the current frustrations of class and future aspirations. Their lives unfolded amidst these contradictions and personal dislocations (expressed as in feeling out of place). It is thus important to "be[ing] attentive to people's subjective consciousness of a status hierarchy and of class" (James, forthcoming). This thesis will show the lives of women who were characterised by an overwhelming aspiration to achieve upward social mobility as part of their middle-class identity, but who were frustrated by their occupations, access to resources, language skills and restrictions linked to their legal statuses in London.

Intimate labour

As I have explained, migration imposed a new logic in the everyday lives of women, especially regarding the occupations they "chose" in London. During my fieldwork, I was constantly intrigued by the particular ambiguities that characterized the work women performed. I soon

realised that some of the ambiguities arose partly from the informal nature of the work , its intrinsic female characteristics and the personal that accompanied it, both in terms of social status and in a moral sense. As maids or nannies, they performed not only physical work, but also brought to the task the attentiveness and consideration to the household in which they worked and to the human relations within it. Similarly, sex workers offered sex, and also the simulation of romantic love and pleasure. To some extent, although in quite different ways, my informants spoke about their work as a process of care and caring.

According to England and Folbre, care work “includes any occupation in which the worker provides a service to someone with whom he or she is in personal (face-to-face) contact. The work is called “caring” on the assumption that the worker responds to a need or desire that is directly expressed by the recipient” (England and Folbre 1999:40). In other words, caring labour includes attending to the physical and emotional needs of others through a series of activities that are intrinsically relational. Whether care work is performed within the house, hospital, brothel or old people’s homes, it entails the establishment of a social relation that is cross-cut by people’s subjectivities and understandings of their particular world.

The literature on care work is vast, but I restrict myself here to the literature that addresses the phenomenon of migrant care workers. This literature focuses on the bewildering kaleidoscope of the global economy of care work in relation to its informalisation, labour rights, negotiations and power relations between employer and employee, as well as on the social penalties that arise when “caring” becomes a form of paid work (Constable 1997, Salazar Parreñas 2001, Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2002, Malkin 2004, Frantz 2010).

Although many different forms of care work, including domestic work, are part of this framework, sex work appears as a different occupation that does not quite fit into the general literature on care work and reproductive labour.¹⁴ Likewise, care work literature does not consider economic activities that provide care in an indirect way, such as the work of domestic workers worked in isolated households or spent hours cleaning empty offices. Part of the concern with these gaps, was recently tackled by Boris and Salazar Parreñas, who developed a new analytical framework called *intimate labour*. Intimate labour focuses on a range of activities

¹⁴ Although Bernstein expands the understanding of reproductive labour and includes sex work (Bernstein 2010).

that belong to the expanding service economy into occupations that are ordinarily private or hidden. For them “a sex worker is clearly an intimate labourer because, after all, intimacy is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Likewise, a domestic worker because of the access to the intimate space of the home and knowledge of its inhabitants’ habits would be an intimate labourer” (2010:5). They explain that intimate labour

reveals acts of love and work for money to be interconnected [it] examine[s] the social construction of commodified intimacies, or, more precisely, the intersection of money and intimacy in everyday life, by looking at the ways that intimacy as material, affective, psychological, and embodied state characterizes such labors. Intimacy occurs in a social context; it is accordingly shaped by, even as it shapes, relations of race, class, gender and sexuality. And the work of intimacy constitutes intimate labors (2010:1).

Intimate labour encompasses a range of activities, including personal and family care, household and bodily upkeep and sexual contact, but more importantly it places the categories of care, domestic and sex work in a continuum. The concept of intimate labour encompasses different forms of care work, including those activities that do not necessarily require face-to-face interaction, but which involve different forms of intimate knowledge. It includes the upkeep of homes as well as people. Most importantly, it “refers to work that exposes personal information that would leave one vulnerable if others had access to such knowledge” (Boris and Salazar Parreñas 2010:5).¹⁵

This analytical framework plays with notions already explored in the literature on care work. However, it allows us to rethink issues around how people experience the commodification of intimacy, that is the mixing of money, intimacy and labour. As Zelizer states, “the intersection of money and intimacy provides a remarkable opportunity to examine how people carry on relational work” (Zelizer 2011:183) – relational work that, in many cases, demands the performance of *emotional labour*.¹⁶ Emotional labour, a term coined by Hochschild, refers to “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value” (2003:7). Hochschild argues that jobs requiring emotional labour are more likely to be performed by women than men

¹⁵ Viviana Zelizer has talked about how the concept of intimacy implies the issue of the sharing of information that if widely available, would damage the other. This issue is further complicated when intimate relations coexist with economic transactions, which in Zelizer’s view is part of the nature of intimate relations anyway (Zelizer 2011).

¹⁶ This concept is already influential in the analysis of the service sector economy in general.

because they involve creating feelings of well-being in others, a role that has been traditionally assigned to women. Emotional labour requires the production of an emotion in a particular person, in parallel to the managing of one's own emotions.

Emotional labour is an intrinsic characteristic of domestic and sex work; it involves high degrees of intimacy, and also the procurement of a feeling of well-being and client/employer satisfaction. Amongst my informants who worked in the sex work industry, the performance and display of pleasure and expressions of care for the clients were essential for the success of the job. In a similar way, the domestic workers were required to disguise fatigue and the frustrations that characterised their monotonous work, as well as avoiding conflict with often demanding and capricious employers. No client wants to deal with a dreary and indifferent prostitute, just as no mother of a household wants to deal with a surly and peevish nanny or cleaner. This particular emotional labour was at the same time performed within traditional western female gender traditional roles, gender roles that had been, in some cases, previously played by my informants within their middle-class families and homes back in Latin America. Emotional labour was performed every day within intimate relations with other people, therefore the dynamics between clients or employers and workers were in a constant uncertain state that oscillated between work, care and intimacy. In light of this, my objective in this thesis is to ethnographically explore the conflicts that middle-class women experienced when they were required to reflect upon the fact that intimacy/care and labour contract do not necessarily complement one other. At different moments my respondents found themselves not knowing how much care they were supposed to provide as part of the "contract", which kind of care, and how far they had to perform (or fake) the care that they were supplying in exchange for money. In other words, the question of how to manage the commodification of intimacy is central to this thesis. According to Constable, the commodification of intimacy

refers to the ways in which intimacy or intimate relations can be treated, understood, or thought of as if they have entered the market: are bought or sold; packaged and advertised; fetishised, commercialised or objectified; consumed or assigned values and prices; and linked in many cases to transnational mobility and migration, echoing a global capitalist flow of goods (2009:50).

One key aspect to this analysis is the way in which women, who worked within a highly exploitative labour market, made sense of this commodification the moment they found themselves part of the exchange. This thesis considers how women thought of themselves as

intimate labourers, and how this position was sometimes experienced as alienating. It takes into consideration the fact that, although women were 'choosing' to migrate, they nonetheless found themselves trapped in the care work economic sector. Migration confers a degree of economic independence that may improve women's status in the family (*c.f.* Ong 1987), yet this is often outweighed by the exploitative nature of the work that they take in London, the low pay and the highly constraining feminine roles that they perform within these jobs. Because of the overall labour conditions that affected their class identity and status, women talked about experiencing a disconnection between their working persons and their real or private persons. This well-known form of separation of the person within capitalism (Zaretsky 1976) was further exacerbated by way their search for middle-class status was juxtaposed with their undocumented status as migrants in London. Although women did experience this separation between the public and private person, the nature of their intimate labour, as well as its outcomes, produced moral conundrums that affected their personhood. This thesis argues that, as a result of the latter, women made individual ethical choices to "locate their persons" *vis-à-vis* the possible "emotive dissonance"¹⁷ which resulted from their occupations.¹⁸

Morality and ethical choices

How should we understand the practices or actions that women engaged in while facing disruptions in their persons/subjectivities? How should we think about these practices? And where do they come from? On the one hand, through their everyday practices as workers, women enacted routines that were shaped by the underlying organisational principles of social class, status and gender roles that were already part of their *habitus* within reproductive labour. Their different practices as intimate labourers, especially through the performance of emotional labour, reproduced a particular system and gender ideology. Consequently, women found

¹⁷ Since I do not engage with psychological anthropology I am not concerned with the analysis of categories like, desires, agency, and consciousness. This thesis does not offer a discussion of how individuals learn, internalise and then are motivated to act from a psychological anthropological point of view. My use of terms describing emotion is based on women's voices and narratives. I cannot claim to be able to read women's minds and feelings, but I use the language of emotions as they used it and try to explore the meanings of it through the analysis of their actions, and reflections of these actions.

¹⁸ "Ethical issues, surrounding emotional labour, have been explored by Hochschild and others. But a few have gone beyond these initial remarks to reflect deeply about the moral, and even social, consequences of our ever more sophisticated tools for inauthentic authenticity" (Steinberg and Figart 1999:23).

themselves trapped in the webs of a highly exploitative market of intimate labour that imposed power relations and forms of intimacy that were sometimes problematic. On the other hand, because of the uniqueness of their situation, these same activities, at different times and with different people, turned into moral challenges that required them to enact intentionalised practices, that is to make reflective choices in alien situations. My aim is to show how women morally evaluated their difficult life situations and developed mechanisms that helped them cope with not only with the trappings of the wider structure but with their personal dislocations.

In creating this frame, it is worth highlighting several things that this study explicitly does not attempt to do while talking about ethics. I do not wish to claim that women's practices, in relation to ethics, are forms of resistance. By focusing on everyday coping practices, I do not seek to romanticise their practices as "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985), nor do I construe them as actors or groups that resist their personal socio-cultural circumstances of subordination (Ong 1987, Abu-Lughod 1986). My aim is to explain how my informants were torn between exploitation and personal estrangements while simultaneously being fully aware of their liminal situations and trying to make the best of them; they were not intending to contest or reinvent their cultural worlds.

However, this thesis does try to highlight a different level of practice or choice. At moments, women opted to engage in particular actions that were understood within idioms of morality and practised as ethics.¹⁹ My interest in these ethical choices (or ethical thinking) emerged from the fact that my informants talked a great deal about morality and moral conflicts, using their personal understandings of what they called "moral values" as guides to make ethical choices, which in many cases turned out to be counter-intuitive. For the purpose of my analysis I understand morality as a set of rules, norms and conventions against which human behaviours are judged, while "ethics is agency" (Stafford 2010:188). If we look at ethics and morality in this way it allows us to "draw attention to the role of thinking and judgment in moral life," shedding light on how, "via (ethical) thinking and judgment we sometimes end up breaking (moral) rules, norms, or conventions, even intentionally opposing them" (Stafford 2010:188). In other words, a woman who engages in (for example sex work) might as well think that what she is doing is

¹⁹ This invites a brief consideration of the recent anthropological interest in morality and ethics. It has been structured along two main theoretical lines, one following the classical Durkheimian-Kantian (Durkheim 1974 [1906]) definition of moral reproduction (Robbins 2007, 2009, 2012), the other taking a Foucauldian-Aristotelian approach to ethical subjectivities and freedom (Zigon 2007, 2009, 2009a, Faubion 2011, Laidlaw 2002, Mahmood 2005). However, the debate around the definition of morality and ethics remains an on-going debate (see Yan 2012).

immoral in some sense, but she might feel that, in her particular circumstances, it is acceptable for her to engage in it, which means that she thinks this is “ethical” in some sense. That is, in order to do what they felt was right, women found themselves behaving immorally and ethically at the same time.

Their motivation for engaging in practices that somehow were against their morality, I argue, went beyond rational self-interest. It related to women’s position and personal judgment of their roles within the different social relationships in their lives. Judgment as part of ethical thinking allows people to think of themselves as relational beings. As Arendt states,

Judgment requires the moral-cognitive capacities for worldliness, that is, an interest in the world and in the human beings who constitute the world and a firm grasp of where one’s own boundaries lie and where those others begin... Whereas thinking requires autonomy, consistency, tenacity, independence and steadfastness, judging requires worldliness, and interest in one’s fellow human beings, and the capacity to appreciate the standpoint of others without projection, idealisation and distortion” (Arendt cited in Lambek 2010:26).

The question that concerns this thesis, then, is how ordinary ethical reflections are heightened or modified in relation to life changing circumstances. What are the motivations behind these choices?

My own research suggests that Latin American women migrants undergo a series of changes and therefore experience a sense of dislocation (as in out of place) that disrupts what they previously regarded as morally good. Because of their life situations in London, women enact and make ethical choices (as self-fashioning practices) in order to adapt themselves to the wider cultural and personal changes imposed by migration.²⁰ According to Foucault ethical thinking implies engaging in a self-fashioning project that is deeply personal and it is based on the constitution of oneself as a moral subject.²¹ This emphasis on self-regulation implies an

²⁰ My research specifically follows a similar framework to that established by Robbins (2004) and Zigon (2010). Both ethnographic explorations of morality and ethical choices are understood within a socio-cultural context in which people are immersed in radical cultural change. In a nutshell, Robbins analyses how recent converts to charismatic Christianity among the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea see their lives as ones in which they have to make moral choices about almost all matters. For Robbins (2004), Urapmin people engage in morality by reflecting on a set of values that changed, meaning that they find themselves forced to choose and weigh their actions in order to remain moral. Zigon (2010), on the other hand, analyses the personal moral breakdowns that people in Post-Soviet Moscow undergo because of a drastic politic-economic change. As a result, people find themselves having to engage in ethical choices that might be counter-intuitive in order to go back to the previous embodied, unreflective morality.

²¹ The so-called techniques of the self are described as “the procedures, which no doubt exist in every civilization, suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a

individual involved in a freely chosen project (Foucault 1997:88). However, contrary to what the utopian idea of freedom might imply, Laidlaw notes that Foucault distances himself from “the idea that to act freely is to act in conformity with reason, and the idea that freedom is only possible in the total absence of constraint or relations of power” (2002:323). However, as Ortner suggests, while analyzing the constraints surrounding freedom as an ideological construct, we must try to “retain some sense of human agency, the capacity of social beings to interpret and morally evaluate their situation and to formulate projects and try to enact them” (Ortner 1995:185). The choices I am referring to are highly contextualised but also exist as providing possibilities for agency and/or action. These choices, then, emerged from personal reflections and judgments on their imagined world (their past lives) in conjunction with their daily lives in the present. By doing this, women enunciate a moral worldview that is central to their middle-class aspirations. These choices were used as a way of fashioning the kind of person they wanted and needed to be. I am not suggesting that they were lacking in the activity of making judgments and ethical choices before migration. Rather, I suggest that they were suddenly propelled into becoming acutely conscious of themselves as moral and ethical actors in a way that had not characterised their previous lives.

Focusing on women’s conscious moral reflections and their engagement in ethics as ordinary practices gives us space to analyse the lives of migrants and the changes they undergo from a different perspective. Through ethics, women wanted to recuperate what they claimed they had lost, that is, their “real self”. Their practices were framed as a way to temporarily recuperate the person they were before migration, as a way to go back to a familiar place. My references to the “real self” are based on my respondents’ understanding of the term which they used to describe firstly, the person they were before they migrated and secondly, moments where the “real self” appeared to collapse and be unstable.²² When I discuss how women experienced personal dislocations, I am not claiming that they were bounded persons who had unproblematic pre-existing “real selves”, rather, it is precisely the morally compromised activities that created the idea that they had a “true or real self” that needed to be separated from their current lifestyle and current roles. For the purpose of this thesis and without getting into a long debate about the person and personhood,²³ I join the anthropological discussion on the

certain number or ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge” (1997:86).

²² The terms they used were, *yo misma* and *eu mesmo*. They also referred to their personal estrangements as not being/feeling like themselves.

²³ I understand personhood as the “means to be a social agent in different historical and cultural contexts (Strathern

Western person that suggests the contrast that persists between the Western and non-Western person is an overstatement (see Bloch 1988, Ourossoff 1993). As Carsten convincingly argues, the Western person is not necessarily bounded but a “relational person” (2004:98).²⁴ The person and the notion of the “real self” that the women explained and referred to, are highly relational, constructed and performed upon their various social roles and related to the constellation of kinship-based roles.

It is within this framework that this thesis must be understood. This thesis as a whole is undoubtedly an ethnography of migration and labour, yet because of its focus on the intimate lives of an eclectic group of women, it intends to provide a deeper insight into their everyday experiences as moral actors. While I take into account theories of intimate labour and its broader structural underpinnings, I also suggest that by looking at intimate changes or personal negotiations, women migrants can be understood as engaging in both the reproduction and the personal contestation of such structures. This thesis thus understands these women as individuals struggling to become the person they want to be – for themselves and their loved ones – amidst seismic changes in their social, economic, relational and moral circumstances.

London as a fieldsite

Joanna Passaro’s article “You can’t take the subway to the field!” echoed in my thoughts every time I took the tube to meet my informants. I not only gained access to my fieldsite via the tube, train, bus or on my bicycle, but at times these spaces acted as the “field” itself. This did not mean that I had to re-enter my field on a daily basis. The place that, as a migrant myself, was my “temporary” home, was also my fieldsite. The London in which I lived, worked and commuted was the “field” or “fieldlike”; whether it was a brothel, a church, eating Latin American food or walking in Hyde Park. It was fluid and changeable.

As has been well documented, conducting urban anthropology is challenging (Fox 1977,

cited in Carsten 2004:85).

²⁴ Her argument takes Ourossoff’s critique on the assumption that the Western person derived not necessarily from ethnographic work on Western people’s lived experiences, but from a philosophical liberalism in which anthropologist themselves are immersed (1993:281-282). As a consequence Carsten further argues that the latter has obscured the most obvious contexts in which relationality is expressed as an aspect of personhood.

Hannerz 1980, Low and Setha 1999, Bourgois 2003, Donner 2006). The fieldsite is not a given space but must be found and produced. In contrast with more traditional anthropology, doing fieldwork in the city requires a constant effort and rather complicated logistics. Rather than simply “hang-out”, observe and wait for life to unfold in front of my analytical anthropological eyes, I needed to elaborate a daily plan. My diary was a crucial resource as I juggled various meetings across the city during the week. Every day I needed to plan and organise follow-up meetings and ensured that my oyster card and mobile phone had sufficient credit.

London, in particular, is testing for an urban anthropologist. It is not only the city’s size, urban crookedness, dysfunctional services or over crowdedness which makes it a challenging place to conduct fieldwork, the multicultural distribution within the city adds further complexity. London is different to many world capitals in its relative lack of spatial ghettoization. Low and Setha (1996) have drawn attention to the fact that many cities produce and reproduce ghettos (for example in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles) into which minorities are slowly displaced, and consequently put out of sight (see Brettel 2000). In Latin America the role of the *favelas* (Brazil) or shanty towns located on the outskirts of the city (for example Caracas, Mexico City, Lima, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, La Paz, among others) have had an important impact on the demographic profile of the city. Cities are divided into “safe” areas on the one hand, and “hot” areas on the other, where crime and destitution are part of daily lives. I do not suggest that London does not have its own “hot” areas, where crime is rife and people live in miserable conditions. However, the composition of the city, for example the relatively even distribution of council housing even in prosperous areas, did not produce the strictly demarcated ghetto spaces which exist in other cities.²⁵ The mixing of private and council housing across London has produced a sometimes uneasy mix, of forced tolerance and occasional social clashes, but in general it forces those from differential-income backgrounds to be aware of each other’s existence. This characteristic of London was evident in the range of places where my informants worked and lived, that is, all over the city. Although it is increasingly difficult for people, especially those on low-income jobs, to pay London rents, my informants were able to afford to live in relatively central areas of the city. When someone asked me where the Latin American neighbourhood was located in London and where my informants lived, I could only answer,

²⁵ Although in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s there were several development projects where the state created housing areas, for the less fortunate, outside London (Hanley, 2007). Pushing people to the outskirts of the city. In recent years there has been an important pressure for gentrification areas which were socially and ethnically mixed (for example Hackney and Brixton). However the rampant property market in London is pushing low-income people to the outskirts of the city.

“everywhere”.²⁶ My fieldwork sometimes appeared as a multi-sited fieldwork, composed of tiny cultural worlds within London. The scattered distribution of my informants made fieldwork more challenging, but at the same time it reflected the everyday reality of women’s lives. They lived and worked in different areas of the city. In addition to their widely distributed living spaces, the women also worked, shopped, visited friends, went to church and spent their leisure time at different locations. Their urban lives reflected the dynamism of the city as well as its diversity.

I originally planned to base my fieldwork in a charity or NGO which worked with women from Latin America. On starting fieldwork, however, I realized that this approach held limitations. Firstly, I encountered several difficulties when trying to become a volunteer in such an organization. The long waiting list for volunteering discouraged me from pursuing this approach. Secondly, as soon as I started meeting women I realised that establishing fixed sites for my fieldwork would actually limit my range of possibilities. Therefore, given my aim to trace Latin American women’s life histories and experiences in London, I found myself doing fieldwork across multiple sites. Formally speaking I did not do what Marcus originally referred to as multi-sited ethnography (1998:82). I did not follow women migrants on their journeys to London and back to their countries. Nonetheless London as a global city with its multicultural landscape made my fieldwork multi-sited in a different sense; or translocal in Appadurai’s sense; “place is no longer a single locality but becomes a complex of localities or, in other words, a translocality” (Appadurai 1995:35), and have multiple meanings for different people. As an ethnographer, my aim was to establish and explore linkages between the different sites that women inhabited in London at different moments. Following what Marcus recommends that we do as anthropologists, that is, “trace a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity” (1995:96), I traced women’s lives over a period of time across the city.

What might be the advantages and drawbacks of such an approach? It has been claimed that doing fieldwork in different sites, or non-traditional sites, limits the participant observation that characterises the work of anthropology (Hannerz 2003, Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Although I felt the frustration of not being able to engage in “participant observation” at all times, I was able to observe quite closely the lives of my informants and became an active participant. This approach was the most practical way of gaining insights into my informants’ lives across

²⁶ Although there are certain Latin American enclaves (Elephant and Castle), as I will explain in this thesis, these areas were nonetheless populated by other ethnic groups as well.

time and space. Throughout my fieldwork participant observation and informal conversations were my methodological tools.

Towards the end of my fieldwork period, having developed very close and intimate relationships with my informants, I dedicated some time (with their permission) to recording their life histories. This reminded my informants of my position as a researcher, and gave them the space to construct their personal narratives of their journeys. As Fischer states, 'the most important use of life histories, particularly in the contemporary world, is the strategic use of a life frame that straddles major social and cultural transformations' (1991:25). Gathering recordings of life histories at the end of my fieldwork period served as a way through which women were able to reflect on changes over time. As I will detail below, by following my informants across the city in their daily lives I was able to situate their life histories and biographies in London. These life histories were a combination of narratives of the past (Chapter Two) and experiences in the present.

Access and developing relationships

Public transport acted as a research site, and it was also useful in establishing initial contact and a temporal space to engage in long conversations with informants. I was doing fieldwork on the move. In fact in late July 2009 my contact with domestic workers began at one of Brixton's crowded bus stops in South London while en route to a Peruvian party celebrating Independence Day. In the early days of my fieldwork I was constantly seeking out and attending Latin American events around the city in order to establish contacts for future research. As I was standing at the bus stop talking to a Puerto Rican friend of mine in Spanish, a woman standing nearby started talking to us. She told us her name was Eva, and she was Peruvian, and we soon discovered that we were going to the same party. We spent the rest of the evening in each other's company and at the end of the night Eva gave me her contact details. Through Eva I met many other Latin American domestic workers whose stories will be told later in this thesis.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, meeting sex workers was not so easily achieved. Initial contact with this group was made through a local NGO that works with sex workers in London. I acted as volunteer at the NGO and had fully disclosed my position as a researcher. The work was exciting as I met women from different parts of the world that worked in the sex industry in London and

learned about the negotiations that they have to engage with within the diverse sex market. I did learn a lot from them. After a while, however, the people running the NGO began to find the presence of an anthropologist who was not and had not been a sex worker, intrusive, and asked me not to contact or intend to establish any further contacts with women. I had already established contacts with some women who were willing to be- and continued to be - part of my research project, I left the NGO and decided to start my own independent search. The internet proved to be an infinite source of potential contacts that eventually became worthwhile and rewarding.²⁷ I went on line and found sites where different women offered “services” that were branded as “escort” services or disguised as “masseur services”. Although I knew it was a gamble I sent an email to several woman, in which I explained my research in Portuguese and Spanish. My selection was, to be honest, quite random because of the vastness of the market. Two women responded, one of whom does not appear in this thesis as we only met on one occasion. However, by a fortuitous opportunity the other turned out to be Sabrina, who became a key informant. She wanted to meet me and was very excited about telling her story. We spoke on the phone before actually meeting, as she wanted to make sure I was not another “client” and as she told me a few months later - she wanted to hear my voice in order to know, to “feel”, if she could trust me or not. Fortunately she said that she perceived “honesty” (as she said) in my voice and felt curious about meeting me. Immediately after our first phone call, she sent me her address and I visited a working flat for the first time in my life. Sabrina became the woman who opened up the world of prostitution to me in this second tranche of my research, and gave me access to other sex workers.

After establishing initial contact with my informants, relationships with them quickly developed. All of them without exception, soon after we met, invited me to their homes. I spent hours with my informants in the spaces of homes, bedrooms in shared houses or working flats where we gossiped, cooked, ate and shared moments of commensality. As well as conducting research in women’s homes, I also had the opportunity to accompany some of them, who were domestic workers, to the houses where they cleaned, and to learn about their daily intimate labour. Spending the working day with my informants, I engaged in participant observation as I helped them with their cleaning duties. I cannot claim that to have experienced the burdens or hard work that they did, but helping them with their work gave me insights into their labour and

²⁷ Before having done this, I had already placed an advertisement in the Latin American and Brazilian newspapers in London explaining my research and looking for women who were interested in participating.

created solidarity between us. I also spent many days (sometimes consecutively) at working flats, flats where sex workers both live and see clients. Participant observation in these spaces was of a different nature. I did not engage in any form of sex work but through long-periods of “hanging out” I did develop an understanding of the everyday nature of prostitution. Days at these flats tended to be a combination of long periods of waiting for my informants while they attended to their clients. During these periods I experienced the pace of life that evolves in such spaces. Some days were busy, with clients arriving round-the-clock until midnight. We always, however, had time to eat, talk about the day, watch a film and go to bed. Other days were the “lazy days”, in which women would only have a few sporadic clients, therefore we would spend the whole day talking and hanging out or running errands. But there were also other days when women pampered themselves with visits from a beautician who cut their hair, gave them manicures and other beauty treatments.

Spending time in these flats was also stressful. They were potentially dangerous places where women were under the constant threat of abuse and violent attacks (something I will discuss later in Chapter Five). I shared this experience of fear and uncertainty with the sex workers each time they opened the door to a new client. Despite the potential danger of the flats, spending time in these flats gave me valuable insights into women’s double lives, enabled me to witness the trials and tribulations of prostitution behind the scenes and to develop close relationships with my informants. Besides visiting my informants in their homes, I was also invited to social events and occasions in which they ceased to be domestic or sex workers, and instead took on the role of caring relatives, mothers, sisters or friends embedded within a social network in London (see Chapter Seven).

My position

As non-English speakers, my informants were in constant need of a translator. Throughout my fieldwork I provided such a service, and became a quasi-mediator between them and the non-Spanish speaking world. I became their “English voice”. I accompanied them on visits to their doctors, dentists, lawyers, employers, landlords, clients and pimps. I also helped them with negotiating phone accounts, setting up bills, filling forms and on visits to state bureaucratic offices. In providing such services I made myself unconditionally available to my informants. At

times this was exhausting, but it enabled me to gain insights into the difficulties which they experienced due to their lack of language skills. More importantly, my role made me valuable to them. This allowed me to gain their trust and access the most intimate aspects of their lives and as a result develop a relationship of trust. Although being a Latin American migrant woman helped me in the development of relationships, it also provoked questions and assumptions regarding my own background. My class, social status, and the fact that “I did not look Mexican”, were continuous sources of comments, queries and distinctions between them and me.

Ethical concerns

The nature of my research brought up ethical concerns even before starting fieldwork.²⁸ First of all, my research entailed working with migrants who were potentially undocumented. Although “illegal” status was not the focus of this research, there was a strong possibility of my encountering people in this situation. Indeed, “illegality” or the possibility of such a status constantly affected my informants’ past, present and future experiences. De Genova (2002) points out the dangers of taking “illegal migrant” as a category of study. By doing so we not only deny that “illegal migrants” live among “legal” migrants, but also we contribute to the naturalisation of such a category. Not fetishising the category of “illegal”, however, does not mean we should ignore it. However, from the moment I encountered women who were “illegal” in London I remained highly sensitive during fieldwork and eventually during the writing up process. I was and am fully aware of the legally precarious position, and the social and legal consequences that disclosure of their status (to both authorities and co-nationals) would entail (see Chapter Three).

The second issue for ethical concern is that my research involved workers in labour markets which, beyond their legal or illegal status, are also highly exploitative. Concealment and cautiousness were the most fundamental skills that I learnt during fieldwork. As I have explained, the women with whom I worked experienced a downward status mobility – compounded by their illegality – that was associated with their occupations. Given this, to save face in front of family and friends many constructed alternative narratives of their life histories and status. In

²⁸ The LSE Ethics committee was an important guide for my proposal and provided me with several comments on what they thought might be ethically problematic in my research.

the case of sex workers I was required to juggle informants' different identities, names, truths and lies (Chapter Five). In doing so I became an expert liar and participated in the fabrication of the different forms of deception that women needed to engage with in order to survive the stigma of sex work. Throughout my research, consent was sought from and given by my informants who were aware of my researcher status. As agreed, the identity of my informants and the information that they shared with me has remained protected throughout my fieldwork and writing up process.²⁹ Early on in my relationship with my informants, they knew that I would protect their identities and were told that the information that they shared with me was not going to be given to anyone. I clarified that pseudonyms would be used and asked if they had any particular preference regarding a particular name. The problems of ethics are a key aspect of any anthropological study. Bearing this in mind, I subjected my work and approach to stern self-scrutiny and to an ongoing process of reflection, in order to determine, and manage, the impact that I was having on the lives of these women.

Outline of the thesis

The thesis begins by considering women's reasons to migrate. **Chapter 2** narrates how women described their migration projects. This chapter looks into the structural forces that pushed women migrants to London, yet moves beyond the conventional scholarly approaches, that view migrants as trapped by wider economic forces. Through an analysis of life narratives, it argues that the reasons for migration are as diverse as the women themselves. The chapter constructs an initial profile of the stories that subsequently develop throughout the thesis. **Chapter 3** provides an exploration of the illegal person, understanding how legal exclusion creates particular moral categories of being. It explores the ways in which women engaged with illegality and the various meanings they attached to it. The chapter offers a first glance of the changes that women underwent at a personal level because of migration, in this case because of the experience of being undocumented and illegal.

Having considered the effects of illegality in the lives of my informants, **Chapter 4** moves to the domestic workers to examine how women migrants engaged in this particular form of

²⁹ I followed the LSE ethics committee rules and regulations as well as those stated in the ASA ethics guidelines.

intimate labour. The chapter highlights the difference between the jobs that women with 'documents' were able to access and the less attractive ones to which undocumented women had access. The 'choice' of particular jobs shows how women tried to negotiate money, social status and freedom. However, regardless of the 'choices' they made, both sets of workers faced the fact that their intimate labour was being commodified. This chapter thus focuses on the moralities at work in these exchanges. It shows how some women chose to care while others did not. In this regard, women who made the ethical choice to care did so by transferring idioms of kinship to their labour. This transference allowed them to cope with the anxieties produced by the intimacies that came with the job.

Taking into account the fact that this thesis looks at domestic and sex work as part of a single spectrum within care work, **Chapter 5** engages with the everyday ethics of sex workers. It explains the incremental steps that women were required to take in order to find themselves in the sex industry. The chapter explores the creation of the "double person" as a practical response to both the stigmas associated with sex work, and the personal choices they undertook in order to protect themselves and their loved ones. This "double person" works on both personal and professional levels. It reveals how sex workers negotiated their work by engaging in different ethical choices. At times these ethical choices contradicted pre-existing ideas of morality. On other occasions, they evolved into other exchanges and different forms of intimacy and care. Regardless of their nature, these choices were used as a strategy to normalise and rediscover previous ideas of the person and cope with the dilemmas that such work entailed.

Chapter 6 considers the complexities of the relationships between sex workers and regular clients. It examines the different forms of payments (both monetary and non-monetary) that are intrinsic to the purchase of intimacy. It considers the exchange of gifts between prostitutes and clients, as well as between employers and domestic workers, and examines the social, economic and moral consequences of such exchanges. Addressing the literature on the gift, this chapter analyses these exchanges in relation to reciprocity, intimacy and emotional labour. The different gift transactions in both occupations are used to normalise anxieties created by tacit labour contracts; the exchange of intimacy is intrinsic to both occupations, albeit in different ways.

Chapter 7 analyses the recuperation of social status through place making practices. It focuses on different practices that women used to invest in themselves, their families, their

present lives and their futures. The chapter explores practices of shopping as well as participation in social events, showing how they are used as strategies to regain the social status lost as a result of migration. It thus demonstrates the complex reality and multi-faceted character of migration. By doing so, the chapter sets up a framework for understanding the necessary conciliation that women engage with in order to reproduce a sense of what many called “normality”. Shopping not only gave my informants a space for leisure and imagining the future, it also became a resource to define and demonstrate a sense of taste and distinction in London. At the same time, it was used to maintain kinship ties with and repay emotional debts to families back home (especially children) in the form of gifts. Likewise, the participation in specific social events in London allowed them to recover their “real” persons momentarily and assert their social positions in spite of their liminal lives in London.

To conclude the thesis, **Chapter 8** finishes with an epilogue that focuses on uncertainty and prospects for the future. Reflecting on and imagining the future was an intrinsic part of women’s lives in London. Everyday activities and choices focused on the achievement of particular goals which allowed them to imagine themselves in the future. Although their lives were relatively restricted because of the occupations they held in London, most structured their lives around imagined futures relating to love, family and work. This imaginative practice was a key feature of their lives in the present; it represented the possibility of reconstructing the life and the person they felt they had lost as part of the migration.

Chapter Two

Narratives of Migration

Stories - of where one has come from, and where one plans to go - seem particularly important for migrants. This is partly because they perhaps more than others, need to give coherence and meaning to their experiences (Gardner, 2002:29).

This first chapter aims to demonstrate how women's narratives of migration - the telling of their particular stories and motivations - offered a means through which women were able to give meaning to their journeys and to their lives in London.

In considering the different personal stories and backgrounds of the women in this thesis it is important to focus on the recurrent themes that appear in the narratives of women's journeys, notwithstanding the differences in their individual life histories. By doing this, I will be not only constructing my own narrative of their migration, but trying to find a balance between their personal narratives and wider structural issues. I will offer a glimpse into women's memories and into the reconstruction of these memories that, as I will show, provide a framework that help women to organise and understand their experiences in London. As Gardner has stated, "narrative is a socially constructed symbolic act in the double sense that (a) it takes on meaning only in a social context and (b) it plays a role in the construction of that social context as a site of meaning within which social actors are implicated" (2002:31). This chapter begins by explaining and providing the reader with a general view of the social context in Latin America. The explanation of this political-economic background serves as the "site of meaning" that women used to construct their own narratives. Following the setting of the socio-political context of the region, I will present the different stories of women's journeys through very personal narratives. Through these narratives women explained the rationale that functioned as triggers for migration. Their stories and motivations are as diverse as the women of this thesis. Debt, planning for the future and family, leaving the past behind, and searching for new

experiences: these were the predominant themes that framed the canvas where women slowly painted their stories.

The stories are neither incomplete nor complete. They often seem coherent, being fragments of women's perceptions of what they considered was important to remember and to tell. Although my own narrative is a fabricated artifice, as it is constructed around topics that emerged from their stories, it builds upon the aspects that women themselves pointed as relevant parts of their identities.

Latin American Migration to London and the UK

London has emerged as a global city in Europe, inhabited and formed by migrants from all over the world. Although many migrants come from countries historically connected to the British colonial endeavour, migration from Latin America is due to the logics of the global economy rather than to a colonial connection. Nonetheless, despite a history of ties - diplomatic as well as commercial - between the UK and Latin America that date back to the 18th century, it was only from the 1970s onwards that a significant upsurge of migration of Latin Americans to London took place.

The first wave of Latin American migration to the UK began in the 1960s and 1970s when political refugees and displaced persons from Chile and Argentina fled from repression at the hands of military governments in those countries. In the mid-1970s, due to war and conflict in their home country, Colombians arrived in large numbers and found it easy to get work permits to work in hotels, restaurants and as cleaners in public buildings in the UK (McIlwaine et al. 2011). However in 1979 the situation changed as the work permit scheme for unskilled workers was sharply reduced in scope. In addition, the UK introduced tourists and working visas requirements for Colombians. But in spite of these restrictions the migration of Colombians, Ecuadorians and Brazilians increased after 1980. In the 1990s, Peruvians joined the list and later, from the early 2000s, Bolivians. Along with Bolivians the year 2000 also saw a steep rise in what

is now the largest nationality group of Latin Americans in London: Brazilians (McIlwaine, et.al. 2010).³⁰

In trying to understand the wider structural reasons that might have influenced my informants' decisions to migrate, we must look at the articulation between individuals' economies of dreams as well as personal choices and the economic structural reasons. Economic factors are usually regarded as 'push' factors causing people to migrate to different parts of the world. At the risk of generalisation, one could argue that the introduction of the different structural adjustment programs in the 1980s, and the eventual neoliberal economic policies throughout Latin America in the 1990s, were influential factors that increased and affected the migration flows to the US and to Europe (Moser and McIlwaine 2004).

A global phenomenon, neoliberalism represents a new, more aggressive stage of capitalism marked by financial and trade liberalization and the embrace of the global 'free' market; a rejection of the Keynesian social contract, accompanied by cuts in social welfare spending; the privatization of state industries; a push towards export-led growth; and the deregulation of prices, wages and environmental protections (Kelly 2008:3)

In Latin America the neoliberal policies caused a "contraction of formal employment as the public sector shrank and the modern industrial sector was savaged by cheap imports under the new 'open markets' doctrine" (Portes and Hoffman, 2003:50). The late 1990s and early 2000s were particularly difficult for Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. In Colombia the armed conflict intensified migration as well as poverty. In Ecuador between 1997 and 2005 the dollarization of the economy along with the overthrow of three presidents affected the economy of the country (McIlwaine, et. al. 2011). In Peru the worsening of the economic situation after the 1982 crisis continued until the collapse of the economy in 1990. These structural economic problems were worsened by the rampant violence that the country went through particularly following the upsurge of Sendero Luminoso in the 80s. In 2001 Bolivia was considered the poorest country in South America with an unemployment rate of 10% of the working age population and with 13% of the working population only earning 400 *bolivianos* (about \$44, \$61 per month).³¹ Poverty and

³⁰ Those arriving to London were a combination of asylum seekers and so-called economic migrants. In this period, the beginning of the 2000s, a significant number of people who applied for asylum were granted permanent status under processes of regularisation such as the family amnesty exercise in the UK in 2003 (McIlwaine et.al, 2010).

³¹ www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/h1/business/1400337.stm. Accessed on the 15th of June 2013.

lack of employment pushed one million migrants out of the country after 2000.³² Later on, with the emergence of social movements in 2003 against the reforms of President Mesa, Bolivia was plunged into a period of political upheaval and social insecurity until 2006 when Evo Morales won the election as the first indigenous president of the country. This in itself eventually led to further political problems. Likewise the political polarisation and the economic instability caused by the presidency of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, since 1999, expelled thousands of Venezuelans from the country. Lastly but not least, Brazil experienced one of its most severe economic crisis in 2002 due to unregulated market forces that widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Similar to the election of Morales in Bolivia, the election of Lula da Silva in 2002 created suspicion and resentment among the international community because of the threat that he might ditch the economic policies imposed by the World Bank and the IMF.

According to Alejandro Portes and Kelly Hoffman (see also Parker 2013) Latin America, with its different economic and political crisis, today remains the region with the most strikingly unequal distribution of wealth in the world (2003:55). Latin Americans, in this case those from the middle classes, have experienced a drastic transformation in occupational status, a reduction in wages and a reduction in the opportunities to improve their social status through university education. The deterioration of the economic conditions of these different countries drastically increased the proportion of people with higher education who were willing, or felt compelled, to migrate.

Besides the economic and political conditions of the region, there is a further important factor to consider. The increase of Latin Americans migrants to Europe was influenced by a series of severe restrictions that the US government imposed on immigration, especially since the 1990s. Border controls were further tightened after the terrorist attack of 11th of September 2001. These measures impeded the access of thousands of migrants into the country. My informants expressed a desire to go to the US as their first option but found it impossible to achieve. Europe offered a viable alternative, thanks to the fewer migration restrictions in comparison to the US and to the increasingly well-established social networks. Most importantly, it offered jobs.

³² <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTBOLIVIA/INSPANISH/Resources/ibce.pdf>. Accessed on the 15th of June 2013.

In Europe, Spain was a popular initial destination for Latin American migrants because of the language and, in some cases, the possibility of claiming nationality by proving Spanish ancestry, thus ensuring legal permanence. The growth of the Latin American population in Spain drastically increased from 13,500 to 200,000 people between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s; by 2006 Spain was host to 1,500,000 Latin Americans (Lopez de Lero y Oso Casas 2007:34-35). The same was true of Portugal for Brazilians: the number of Brazilians legally resident in Portugal in 2005 was more than 80,000, making it the largest single foreign group in the country (Padilla 2007:69-70). Latin American migrants were attracted to Spain because of its rapid economic growth due to the flourishing of the real estate market.³³ However, with the global economic crisis of 2008, the sub-prime crisis in the country led to the collapse of the real estate market and horrendous levels of debt. This in consequence provoked a steep rise in unemployment followed by a collateral crisis on employment benefits. "As of February 2011, unemployment in Spain still hovers around 20 percent of the labour force (4.3 million people), the highest in the industrialised world" (Harrington, 2011:9-10).

By the time I started doing my fieldwork in September 2009, I witnessed an increase in Latin American people coming particularly from Spain, but also from Italy and Portugal, in order to find work in London. Additionally to the crisis, Latin American people were facing ever-increasing levels of discrimination and racism within Spain and were experiencing scarcity in job opportunities. This sharply contrasted with the perception of London as a place where human rights were respected, where women's rights were protected, and where – since racism was not a significant concern - migrants could easily diffuse into the multicultural landscape (MacIlwaine 2007). Other attractive factors were the relative strength in the economy, the perception of abundant economic opportunities and the ease of surviving with no or very little English (McIlwaine 2007, Sveinsson 2007, James 2005, Evans et. al. 2007). Consequently, among Latin American migrants and would-be migrants, London became a destination of choice.

Even though the Latin American population has increased in London, it is still relatively small compared to other migrant groups (i.e., India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, West Indies, and others). McIlwaine (2007, 2008) points out that there might be as many as 1 million Latin Americans in

³³ From 2000-2008, Spain's population grew from 40 million to 45 million, and from 1999 until 2007 the Spanish economy created more than one-third of all employment generated in the Eurozone. As more migrants came to Spain, more housing was necessary and therefore the cycle continued, until it became financially unsustainable (Mansanet and Padilla 2010).

London alone. In June 2006 the Office of National Statistics Labour Force Survey estimated that there were the following numbers of Latin Americans:

Office of National Statistics Labour Force Survey. June 2006			
Colombians	18,000	Brazilians	25,000
Argentineans	4,000	Chileans	1,000
Guyanese	16,000		

Figure 1

In 2007 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office suggested that there were between 700,000 to 1,000,000 Latin Americans visiting and living in the UK. However these statistics could be underestimates because of the high proportion of undocumented Latin Americans. Even more, as Latin Americans are not considered a separate category in ethnic group classifications, it is very hard to build up a profile of their actual situation in London. A recent study by McIlwaine, Cook and Linneker (2010) offers the latest data on the size of the Latin American population in London. The study includes irregular, undocumented migrants and the second generation of Latin Americans born in the UK. The estimate, for 2008, of the Latin American community in London is of 113,500.³⁴

Because the arrival of this community is fairly recent, the literature on the topic is scarce. The few studies that have been conducted on Latin American migration to the UK have focused mainly on economic and political aspects. Conducted mostly by geographers and other social scientists, they highlight hardships, issues of welfare, employment conditions and the like (Sepulveda 2007, Wright 2010, Wills 2010). Initially, these studies were notable for examining specific national/linguistic groupings: they tended to divide Brazilians from Spanish-speaking Latin Americans, and then to subdivide the Spanish-speaking countries from each other. For example, studies by McIlwaine (2005), Guarnizo (2008) and Cock (2009, 2011) presented research on transnational practices of Colombians in London and later on moved on to

³⁴ According to McIlwaine, the central estimate for the UK Latin American population in 2008 was 186,500. This suggests that 61% of the UK Latin American population resides in London. (2011:29)

Ecuadorians and Bolivians (McIlwaine 2007, 2008). Other studies documented Brazilians, Bolivians and Ecuadorians respectively (James 2005, Evans et. al 2007, 2011, Sveinsson 2007). Other studies explored specific topics, such as Colombian asylum seekers' applications of those fleeing violence and insecurity (Bermudez Torres 2003), or the impact of Latin American culture in London (Roman-Velazquez 1999). More comprehensive in scope, one of the most recent studies is a large-scale quantitative survey complemented by some qualitative in-depth interviews. It includes respondents from a wide range of nationalities and socio-economic groups in London (McIlwaine, Cock and Linneker 2010).³⁵ It offers the latest data regarding a wide variety of topics concerning the state of Latin Americans migrants in London, and will be referred to frequently in this thesis. Along with these studies, the recent growth of scholars researching Brazilian migration to London has focused on different aspects of the everyday lives of Brazilians in London. From food as a transnational practice (Brightwell 2012), to the analysis of religious practices in London (Sheringham 2011), or the investigation of second generation Brazilian children from a linguistic point of view (Souza 2008, 2010). These studies offer a more nuanced understanding of this national cultural group than previous scholarship.

In order to explain Latin American migration to the UK, these studies implicitly use the classic 'push' and 'pull' – or 'supply' and 'demand' – framework. Overall, the studies suggest that most Latin American migrants in London work or have worked in the cleaning or caring sector (Bermudez Torres 2003, Guarnizo 2006, Evans et. al, 2007, Sveinsson 2007, McIlwaine 2005, 2007). Most men take jobs as cleaners and work for large, multinational cleaning companies on a sub-contracted basis. They can also work in hotels, catering and in construction (Evans, et. al 2007). Women on the other hand commonly work as domestic workers, sex workers and nannies. While I would not wish to claim that this situation applies to all Latin Americans in London or in the UK, the data demonstrates that a large group of people, in this case women, engage in these types of occupations for various reasons. An elaboration of their motivations is a key part of what follows in this study.

On the 'pull' side it has been suggested that the presence of this particular group of migrants is due to the demand for female labour in domestic service and, in the case of Brazilians specifically, also in the sex trade (Pellegrino, 2004). On the 'push' side, it has been suggested by

³⁵ There is also an edited volume that puts together different scholars doing research among the Latin American community in Europe and in the UK (McIlwaine 2011).

Sveinsson (in the Bolivian context) and Caroline Moser (in the Ecuadorian context), that the oppressive gender relations that women experience, particularly within the family or in marriage, are part of the reasons to migrate (Sveinsson 2007, Moser 2004). Based upon these strictly gendered stereotypes, their apparently constrained work roles once they get to London have, however, been said to give women some leverage rather than simply pigeonholing them in a negative way. According to McIlwaine (2008), one of the main characteristics of Latin American women in London is that they have more job opportunities than men do, being more readily employable and, as a result, able to earn more money than men in the city. It is this, which according to certain modes of analysis is said to provide them with a degree of 'empowerment'. Indeed, migration confers a degree of economic independence that may improve women's status in the family. This is outweighed, however, by the exploitative nature and the low payoff the work that they take.

Of key importance is the fact that this is a largely middle class migration. As Portes and Hoffman suggest, the ones that migrate are "not the informal proletariat, but classes possessing greater endowments, non-manual skilled workers and artisans, and members of the petty bourgeoisie" (2003:70). Thus, taking up jobs in the care work sector often represents high levels of de-skilling in relation to people's education and class backgrounds. Part of the reason is due to the fact that most Latin American migrants in London hold at least secondary school qualifications, or university degrees, but cannot easily find jobs because they lack English skills, because non-EU qualifications are rarely recognised in the UK, and because they are undocumented (McIlwaine 2007, Evans et al. 2007). Although the literature on Latin American migration to London acknowledges the loss of status that migrants experience because of their occupations and legal status, there has not been, so far at least, a nuanced analysis of the consequences of their downward status mobility, of the personal mechanisms through which women cope with their new occupations, and of their individual perceptions of those changes. Drawing on personal narratives of the life histories of Latin American women in London, this chapter serves as an introduction to describe the reasons, motivations and expectations of my informants in relation to migration. It shows how migration is both a decision and a process that is inextricably linked to the political economy of their countries of origin, to the dynamics of wider trends of international female migration and to personal dreams and aspirations.

Narratives of debt

Most of the women I got to know had built up considerable debt, and this loomed large in their accounts of what prompted them to come to London. In many cases debt originated because of the bankruptcy of businesses generated by a wider economic crisis, chronic unemployment, lack of state support, surmounted by endemic violence and insecurity. Forty seven-year-old Sarita from Honduras, mother of three, Martha (thirty one years old), Jose (twenty eight years old) and Aylin (fifteen years old) migrated to Madrid in 2005 in order to settle a debt of \$60,000 that she and her husband accumulated over the course of two years in Honduras. The debt originated from a \$20,000 bank loan that Sarita and Jesus, her husband, acquired in order to set up a carpentry workshop for Jesus and to rebuild Sarita's restaurant that was destroyed during Hurricane Mitch in 1998. This first loan was initially used to rent a locale where Jesus could work and buy the initial material in Panama to start the business. At the beginning the workshop was running efficiently and paying dividends; Jesus started having plenty of orders placed, more orders than he could manage to finance, as a result, he was required to buy material on credit in order to be able to meet the demand. At the same time, Sarita invested in a food stand provided by Coca-Cola where she cooked Mexican food outside Jesus' carpentry workshop. Despite the fact that Jesus had plenty of orders, customers were only able to buy through credit and he allowed customers to re pay by installments. After almost two years they were running out of money and options; they owed money on credit cards and were unable to secure the payments from Jesus' clients. By this point their debt amounted to almost \$60,000. With no money to pay off the interest levied by the bank or the credit cards, they had no option but to mortgage their home in order to get a loan from the bank and continue working. On top of everything, Sarita told me that the gangs controlling the area were collecting "war" money from local people. Small businesses like theirs were required to pay for "protection" from the gangs. As she told me, they had no choice: they had seen people get killed or members of their families kidnapped for refusing to pay. Sarita explained that their situation was hopeless; they could not see a real opportunity to keep the house as the banks were threatening to repossess the property.

Violence, economic instability, lack of protection from the state and debt triggered Sarita's decision to migrate to Spain. There she had a brother who assured her that he could find her a job that would help her to repay her debts back in Honduras. She left Honduras in May 2005,

leaving behind her children who eventually migrated to Spain in 2009. Sarita lived in Madrid for a few months at her brother's house. She said, she only kept enough money for transport and food and sent the rest to Jesus for the payment of the debt. However her income was not enough even to pay the interest. Her economic situation provoked sleepless nights in which she worried about losing the house. Back in Honduras, Jesus was making very little money and started to receive threats from the protection racketeers. As he recalls, the situation was intolerable and hopeless, he just wanted to leave Honduras and take his youngest child with him. By December 2005, Jesus decided to come to London with the couple's youngest daughter Aylin and was joined by Sarita immediately afterwards. They chose London because of the UK's minimal visa restrictions for Honduran people, and because of the possibilities it offered to find work and pay off their debts.³⁶ In London, Sarita started working as cleaner for a company - with the help of a fake Spanish passport - where she earned £220 p/w in addition to the work that she did as a domestic worker in several houses. After five years, with the income from the different housekeeping jobs, plus Jesus' sporadic carpentry jobs, they were able to repay their debt by sending £700 per month to Honduras. As had been the case with Sarita in Spain, they barely spent any money in London and kept only the necessary money to pay for food, rent and transportation. As she said, they had never lived like this before, they were not rich before but they could afford living beyond the necessary means.

For Sarita it was not the economic restrictions that were the worst aspect of being indebted, but the moral burden that it produced. While explaining her indebtedness, she could not help but think that it had been their personal decisions which had placed them in such a precarious situation. The fact that the interest levied by the bank was too high, and that such financial policies might have had an impact on their overall economic catastrophe, was not perceived as a problem or as an injustice. According to her, their debt had accumulated due to bad financial decisions: instead of producing furniture to be sold for cash Jesus kept on producing under a regime of credit that continuously transformed into debt. Nonetheless, as she further explained to me, her debt had been caused because of the desire to construct a better life for her family; it had not been incurred by consuming luxury goods, like clothes or other unnecessary things, as many people did. All in all, their economic catastrophe was due to the fact that they wanted to save their business and save the economic and personal investment they had placed in

³⁶ As other countries from Latin America (Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile) Honduran people are not required to apply for a tourist visa in advance in order to come to the UK. They are given the visa at the port of entry.

the project and in their future. This future was envisioned as one in which they would be able to send their children to University. Their sense of what it meant to be middle-class rested on the possibility of bettering themselves and the social position of their children through education. Sarita and Jesus described themselves as 'hard working people' who had lived a comfortable life (i.e., had their own house, cars, and small businesses) until they got into debt and the political conditions of Honduras worsened.

Whereas the story of Sarita and Jesus exposes how debt was accrued through the failure of entrepreneurial projects, debt was accumulated and understood in different ways by different people. For some women debt had accrued as a result of unemployment and lack of opportunities; an aspect that became a 'push' factor in the eventual decision to migrate. Although my project includes women from different countries who faced quite different life experiences, overall they confronted similar economic circumstances that impacted on their access to employment and other resources. Bolivian women, for example, explained that the economic crisis in Bolivia at the beginning of 2000 had fundamentally altered the prospects of employment for the middle and lower classes. As Lourdes (fifty one years old) from Cochabamba told me, not even those with higher education could get a job back then. Having university degrees, and in some cases post-graduate education, made no difference when it came to accessing better jobs or improving future life prospects. Lourdes' husband, Pedro, who held a master's degree and used to work as a researcher in biology for a private company and also taught at University in Cochabamba, was unemployed for two years before coming to London. He explained that his redundancy was due to lack of funding, cuts and *compadrazgo* relations within the company. These nepotistic quasi-kinship relations benefited those who were connected to local leaders but left people like him, who did not have the proper political liaisons with the right people, out of favour and out of employment.

Lourdes became the breadwinner of the family over the two years of Pedro's unemployment, but not without difficulties. She was a petty entrepreneur who rented a market stand where she sold preserves, fruit preserves and other tinned goods in Cochabamba. However her income was insufficient to support a family of five: her daughter Pamela (seventeen years old), Fernando (two years old) and Pablo (three years old). With very little income from the business they had to mortgage the house in order to get a loan from the bank, hoping that Pedro would find a job soon. When their debt accrued to \$20,000 and they found themselves in danger

of having the house repossessed, he made the decision to migrate to the UK in 2002. As I will explain in the next chapter, Pedro was deported after being in the UK for two years, but found his way back to UK with his family. Since the beginning, their idea was to settle in the UK for good after having paid their debt.

We think that our children will have better opportunities here than they would have in Bolivia - it's a more advanced country and the universities are better. My husband is an example of the problems in Bolivia - a professional with a postgraduate education can't feed his family and has to emigrate to work, Lourdes told me.

By moving to the UK, they hoped they would be able to catapult their children into professional or white-collar jobs with social prestige. Pedro as a middle-class professional was aware of the difficulties in maintaining the lifestyle they wanted and climbing up the social ladder back in Bolivia. With these hopes in mind, the new trip would necessitate an investment of \$6000 to pay for travel, money that Lourdes obtained from a moneylender/loanshark (in Spanish, *usurero* or *prestamista*). She left the country without telling the moneylender/loanshark of her intention to do so, only contacting this person once arriving in the UK to inform her that she had left Bolivia but that she was aware of her moral obligation to pay the debt. For six months she was able only to pay the interest accumulating on the loan. The rest of their debt was settled after seven years in London. As she explained, it was difficult to save money because London was expensive and the children represented a huge financial burden; still they managed to pay off their debt and recover their house in Cochabamba.

Similar stories were narrated by Jovanna (thirty eight years old) and Cecilia (thirty seven years old) from Santa Cruz, Bolivia, who found themselves unemployed with mortgages to pay and very little prospect of finding jobs, even though they both held university degrees. As an accountant, Cecilia used to work in an accountant's office and earned enough money to have a comfortable life and help with the household expenses in her parents' home. Unfortunately her father had a stroke in 2003 and the family had no medical insurance, as a result, Cecilia and her brother incurred considerable debt in order to pay for the expensive medical bills at a private clinic. After the first stroke Cecilia's father had several relapses, which represented more expenses. As she recalls the bills were building up, it was expensive to pay for medical treatment and her salary was simply not enough to pay the bills and pay for medicines. With debts and the high risks of her father relapsing, they mortgaged the house in order to finance their current

expenses. In addition to the already precarious situation, Cecilia was made redundant in 2005 and had very little prospect of finding a job due to the general economic crisis that the country was experiencing. After trying to get a job and getting into more debt, she came to London in 2006, knowing that the UK offered employment opportunities. Although she did not have any contacts in the UK, she had heard many success stories about people from Santa Cruz coming to London, as well as seeing employment opportunities in London advertised in the local newspapers (something that many people recalled).

In similar vein, Jovanna, who was a single mother of a girl (who was ten years old by the time I met her) and worked as a computer technician and IT teacher, lost her job in 2001. While narrating her story, she told me that the situation in Bolivia became unbearable; first she was unable to find any work, her father's house was about to be repossessed by the bank and her ex-partner refused to give any money to support her child. 'The day I found myself with no money to buy milk and diapers for my baby was the moment when I decided to come to London'. She explained to me that she wanted to give her daughter the life she had grown up with. She mentioned that her family was not rich, but that her father had offered them a comfortable middle-class life. They had their own house and cars, and they all went to college. Her brother was a lawyer and her sister an accountant. Her mother had been a housewife who had never had to work. But as Jovanna said, 'the dream was over', she had to do something about her current situation. She had a cousin who had been living in London for a couple of years and had told her that he could get her a cleaning job in which she could earn up to £10 an hour. Even though she found it very difficult to cope with the idea of working as a cleaner, she said, this was the only solution she could foresee to solve her problems. In order to come to London in 2002 she was forced to ask for a \$5000 loan from a moneylender/loanshark in order to pay for the flight and initial expenses. This debt, according to her, was paid in the first 15 months of working in London, including the interest; however she was unable to help her father to save the house, which was eventually repossessed by the bank. When this occurred Jovanna's sister, Karina, came to London in 2006 to work as a cleaner; with both of their salaries and with their brother's help, they were able to settle their father's debts and invest in the purchase of a piece of land for the construction of a new house. Jovanna's plan was to stay in London for one more year and go back to Bolivia to her daughter who she had not seen for four years. However, in June 2006 Jovanna was diagnosed with breast cancer that initially required chemotherapy plus two

episodes of surgery. With high prospects of relapsing, it was impossible for her to go back to Bolivia especially because she did not have any form of social security or health insurance to treat her illness. At this point she decided to bring her daughter and mother (Vilma) to stay in London with her. Jovanna's sickness and the possibility of accessing medical treatment that, while not offering a cure for cancer, afforded better life prospects, became the major reason for her to stay in London permanently.

I wish to stay in the UK to continue with my treatment. I would not be able to get this type of treatment if I went back to Bolivia - the health system is very poor and this type of treatment is not available. Many people in Bolivia go abroad for medical treatment - for example to Chile or to Brazil - as the facilities do not exist in Bolivia. My cousin is a doctor of oncology who works in Brazil. When I told her about my diagnosis she told me that I wouldn't be able to get treatment in Bolivia, the best option for me was to stay in the UK.

Although migration was initially envisaged as a temporary enterprise, it became a permanent project once they settled and started a new family in London, as in the case of Cecilia, or when life circumstances changed so drastically that going back home was not a possibility, as happened to Jovanna. After a few years, Cecilia, Jovanna and Lourdes were able to settle their debts back in Bolivia; nonetheless, responsibilities towards their immediate and extended families back in their countries continued to represent a moral obligation that they had to fulfill. As Cecilia once told me,

I will never stop sending money to my father back in Bolivia because I know they need the money. It has become more difficult now that I have a daughter in London, but I cannot stop sending money to my parents, they would not survive without the money I send.

So far I have presented the stories in which women accrued debts as a result of structural economic problems and endemic inequality in their countries of origin, where securing stable formal employment was, if not impossible, challenging and unlikely to happen at moments of crisis.³⁷ In other cases, in contrast, women's migration was prompted by the need to pay off debts associated with middle-class aspirations of coming to Europe.³⁸ The irony in the story of forty-

³⁷ Related to Portes and Hoffman's explanation of the informal economy among the informal proletariat. (Portes and Hoffman, 2003: 45-46)

³⁸ See O'Dougherty for similar aspirations, among middle-class Paulistas, of going to Disneyland (2002: 94-110).

nine-year-old Sonia, from Bolivia, was that the means of paying the debt was also the action which caused the debt to be incurred in the first place.

In 2004 Paulina (Sonia's daughter) finished college and wanted to travel in Europe before getting a job in Bolivia. Sonia agreed to help with the expenses of the trip, as it was an aspiration that she too had had when she was young. The possibility of her daughter doing the trip fulfilled her frustrated aspirations. She was a highly educated woman with a masters' degree in clinical pharmacology, taught organic chemistry at a university and worked part time at the local hospital, where she was in charge of the biochemistry laboratory. Besides these two jobs, Sonia owned a pharmacy in the town where she lived with her eighteen-year-old daughter and two sons Julio and Jonathan (fifteen years old and twelve years old respectively). As a divorced woman, she was the main breadwinner of the family but received a monthly stipend for the payment of the fees for her sons' private schools.

With all my jobs I earned around \$1,100 in total per month. I had to work a lot to earn this amount and even when I got home at night, I would sometimes have to mark papers for my students. This sort of money in Bolivia was a good salary and my family and I lived well. I could send my children to good schools and we had a good standard of living. The only thing was that I lived in a rented house but apart from that things were good. Had my daughter not got me into debt, things would have been fine and I never would have come to the UK.

In order to pay for Paulina's trip, Sonia asked for a first bank loan of \$4,000 that would cover the cost of the flight and expenses for the trip. Paulina flew to Madrid on the 11th of March of 2004. As luck would have it, this was the same day of the terrorist attack in *Atocha*, so she was not able to enter into the country. Her plane was sent back to Peru from where she had to find her way back to Bolivia a week later. After the failed trip to Europe, and now with \$3,000 less in ready cash, she insisted on going back to Europe, this time to Italy. Sonia asked for a second bank loan; on this occasion she borrowed \$2,500 from one bank and \$500 from another. The loans were granted, given that she had her pharmacy business as a guarantee. From this moment the agreement with Paulina was that she would pay the money back as soon as she got to Italy and found a job; however, once in Italy, she was unable to find work and got pregnant after six months by a Bolivian man. With Paulina's pregnancy the payment of the debt had to be absorbed entirely by Sonia. After a while, she said that without even noticing she found herself in an

ensuing debacle, trying to juggle the different debts by borrowing money from one creditor to pay the other, by using the proceeds from the pharmacy to pay both and by getting into further debt, 'I was up to my neck in debt' (*con el agua hasta el cuello*). In her attempt to rectify the situation Sonia was forced into further indebtedness at the hands of moneylenders/loansharks. As James states "...people often used such a lender as a last resort: the final option when all others have already been explored, undertaken in addition to, not instead of these other options" (2012:32). As she said, the risky choice of using a moneylender/loanshark was the difference between having money to pay the rent or being evicted from the house. In relation to this, it is important to understand why debt is viewed as inescapable even if one is borrowing from an illicit moneylender. One could argue that this sense of obligation was linked to their need to "save face" and recuperate the social position –of them and their families - they could potentially lose by not paying. In the end, Sonia was forced to sell the business, because the situation was unsustainable.

As I ran out of stock in the pharmacy, it stopped becoming financially viable and my economic situation became critical. Then a friend she told me that if I came to England and work for a while I would be able to pay for my debts in no time. I didn't even know where England was, but I had to do it as my debt had increased up to \$18,000 due to the interest and still I needed an extra \$6,000 to pay for the trip.

As Sonia recalls, her debt was a result of, firstly, her own mistake of spoiling her daughter and, secondly, the different sources of credit to which she had access that only patched up other debts but never resolved the problem. She entered into a cycle of self-lending from previous sources of credit, therefore getting into an endless cycle of debt. Debt for these women was understood as a combination of individual and structural factors. They blamed their situation on bad financial decisions that nonetheless had been the consequences of a failed state. As middle-class, well-educated women they had experienced the shrinking of opportunities to maintain the level of life they desired and deserved. Their chances of progress were shrinking and their social position was at risk.

The European crisis

Different types of economic crisis and personal economic investments pushed women into debt at different periods of time. As I have explained, some of my informants migrated to London from Spain after having lived in the country for decades. Spain had been a major destination for Latin Americans since the early 1990s; however after the crisis of 2008 many Latin Americans (who had Spanish passports) turned their attention to London as a destination to find employment opportunities and, in the case of Rosa from Peru and Amelia from Venezuela, earn money to pay their debts. They became what many Latin American migrants in London called ‘the displaced Spaniards’ (*los “españoles” desplazados*), that is the Latin American “Spanish” people.³⁹

Take forty-seven-year-old Rosa from Peru who migrated to Madrid twenty years ago leaving two children and her husband behind (who joined her in Spain three years later). Rosa’s migration from Peru, as she recalls it, was due to the insecurity that prevailed in the country, rampant unemployment, insecurity and the limited future prospects for her family. The decade of the 1990s witnessed an increase of Peruvians migrating to Spain due to the offer of labour opportunities promoted through newspaper and recruitment agencies for domestic work, nursing and construction.⁴⁰ After living in Spain for fifteen years, Rosa, like many of the people I encountered, was forced to embark on a second migration, this time to London. She arrived in London at the end of 2008, pushed by the economic crisis and unemployment in Spain; her husband had lost his job and even though he was receiving *el paro* (unemployment benefit) her income was not enough to keep them afloat between daily expenses, mortgage payments and the university costs for her youngest son who was studying odontology. The first loan of €15,000 from a moneylender/loanshark was used to alleviate the interest accumulated by the mortgage and university fees. Rosa’s need to borrow from a moneylender/loanshark was explained to me as the last resource they had, as they could not ask for a loan at the bank but still needed to pay the bills. She told me that university education was the only “real” thing that they could give to their son, they felt compelled to offer him better opportunities for his future. With debts

³⁹ Some of my informants who came from Spain gain their Spanish passports through the different amnesties that the Spanish government granted to migrants in the past.

⁴⁰ http://sirio.ua.es/documentos/pdf/grupos_nacionales/la%20inmigracion%20peruana.pdf. Last accessed, October 24th, 2013.

accumulating and the economic crisis in Spain worsening, Rosa migrated to London and found a job as a live-in domestic worker where she earned £500 a week, money that was sent to Spain. By the beginning of 2010, without any job prospects back in Spain and with the unemployment benefit reduced by 50%, Rosa's husband and son decided to set up a business, a small convenience store outside Madrid. In order to avoid another moneylender/loanshark, she asked her employer for a loan of £5,000 for the setting-up of the business; unfortunately after a couple of months, the business went bankrupt and she was left with a debt that accrued to almost €30,000. Finally, in February 2011, Rosa's husband migrated to London and with his Spanish passport acquired a cleaning job in London to help Rosa in the payment of their debts.

Amelia, fifty three, was in a similar situation. Amelia was born in Spain, but migrated to Caracas with her family when she was only nine years old. After having constructed a life in Caracas she returned to Madrid in 2000, more than forty years later, in order to take care of her elderly mother who had returned to Spain. With a Spanish passport and experience in real estate, Amelia did not have many difficulties finding a job in Madrid, especially with the booming construction industry. With the business flourishing, she decided to set up a convenience store in 2007 as a form of investment in her future. For Amelia, entrepreneurship was perceived as a sign of success and the opportunity to become productive and, more importantly, self-sufficient. Even though she wanted to live between Venezuela and Spain, she thought that securing a small business could guarantee a steady income in spite of her location. Thus, with part of her savings and an initial bank loan of €10000, Amelia opened up the store in Madrid. The business was running and even though most of the profits were invested back into the business, she was earning enough income to live comfortably, be her own boss and pay back her debt. In the same year her son got married, and even though he and his girlfriend wanted to pay for the wedding, she insisted on making a contribution of €10,000 (which she borrowed from another bank) and gave it as a wedding gift for them to have a luxurious wedding. As she told me once, she knew that the gift was increasing her debt, still Ricardo was her only son and was getting married, 'these things only happen once in life'. Unfortunately in 2008 with the collapse of the Spanish economy, Amelia lost her business and thereby found herself with a debt that she was not able to settle in Spain. In January 2009 she found a good opportunity to work for a Spanish family in

London, as a live-in domestic worker, which she said would help her paying off her debt without anyone knowing in Venezuela what she was in fact doing.⁴¹

While acknowledging the pressure caused by debt which these examples suggest and while recognising the structural conditions that affected their indebtedness, one must be aware that not all women accrued debt in the same way or thought about debt in the same manner. For other women getting into debt was a pre-requisite for social mobility and migration. Let me illustrate the latter with Eva's story. Forty-seven-year-old Eva from Peru, after having migrated to Spain twenty two years ago, embarked on a second migration and came to London. Besides knowing that she would earn more money as a domestic worker in London than in Spain, she wanted her seventeen-year-old daughter to learn English and attend university in the UK. In order to achieve her goal and come to London, Eva asked for a loan of €10,000 from a Bolivian moneylender/loanshark in Madrid. Such an amount, she said was needed for the initial expenses of the trip and also the money represented a safety net in case she could not find work in London immediately. As she told me, she would rather be indebted than penniless. Furthermore, she did not want to arrive in London and be forced to live in a horrible place, she wanted to have the money to pay for "decent" accommodation.

For Eva debt was a necessary inconvenience in order to achieve what she thought of as social mobility. When she first migrated to Madrid twenty years ago, she was forced to borrow money in order to buy her ticket. Back then, Eva – who was pregnant – left her home to go to Spain in order to avoid the shame of single motherhood. At the same time she was avoiding the shame of being acquainted with her daughter's father, who as she constantly said was "*De lo mas profundo del Peru*" (from the deepest part of the Peruvian landscape). This racist remark referred to the indigenous background of her ex-partner, something from which she wanted to distance herself. Migrating to Spain appeared as the solution for her problems, and getting into debt became a gateway to self-improvement. It had allowed her to aspire to a different life.

As I have explained, economic crisis at different moments and in different countries was a fundamental structural 'push' factor for migration. Most of my informants defined themselves as middle-class Latin Americans who were struggling with the economic situation in their countries of origin. They were confronted, as a result, with the restricted set of livelihood opportunities

⁴¹ By the time I met Amelia in November 2009, she was earning £1,000 per month and according to her was slowly dealing with the payment of her debts.

resulting from that situation. As I explained in the Introduction, I do not want to get drawn into differentiating between different groups within the middle classes; that is, lower middle, middle middle and upper middle (although I am aware that those differences do exist). I am referring to them as “middle class” because that is the way they referred to themselves and it is certainly what they aspired to be.⁴²

Regardless of the differences within one particular social class these women found themselves squeezed: caught in the contradictions arising out of the mismatch between their middle-class aspirations and the structural economic crises of their countries that threatened their lifestyle and future plans. For middle class people in Latin America debts were incurred at a higher rate than they might have been elsewhere, because of the economic instability and associated aspects of state collapse, including unemployment, high costs of health care and insecurity. Eventually, for some, the unfortunate global crisis of 2008 placed them on a precarious threshold, compelling them to move to a new country for the second time in quick succession.

Regardless of the origin of their state of indebtedness, women felt a moral obligation to settle their debts, even when they owed money to illegal lenders and could have stopped paying the high interest by using the long distance in their favour. While explaining the reasons, women would usually refer to the settling of their debts as important in saving face and protecting the reputation of their families back in their countries; they needed to recuperate the respectability that they had lost due to migration. Shame, which is inextricably linked to the experience of debt - and also linked to their middle class identity - made them experienced indebtedness in a very individualized way. The shame of debt for those accustomed to living in a more sustainable fashion represented the failure of their social class membership. As a result they wished to be out of sight, to repay their debt in private. It became a private matter that required a prompt solution. As David Graeber states, “It’s precisely when the money changes hands, when the debt is cancelled, that equality is restored *and* both parties can walk away and have nothing further to do with each other” (2011:122). Arising out of this, it was this temporality of debt that particularly affected my informants: in order to think about their future, either in London or back in their countries, debts had to be settled. As Gustav Peebles has suggested, “The crucial

⁴² Besides the fact that an individual’s perceptions are fundamental in the definition and construction of a social identity, because of the nature of my research I had no access to information about my respondents’ previous lives in order to confirm or contradict their narratives regarding class.

defining feature of credit/debt is its ability to link the present to the past and the future” (2010:226). In a convoluted way, the investment in their future was inextricably linked to their state of indebtedness, as one originated from the other; however migration, and their lives in London, offered the opportunity to imagine other possibilities for the future.

All of them expressed having experienced a constant anxiety, not being able to sleep at night and having nightmares associated with their debts. The anguish that Sarita felt when thinking about her daughter back in Honduras, and about how she was probably being judged by other people and possibly being in physical danger, fed into the need to settle their debts as soon as possible. Although she was out of sight, her daughter was forced to carry the shame of her parents’ debt. She was worried about ‘what people will say’. For most, settling their debts implied the recuperation of their properties (thought of as part of who they were), and regaining the respectability of their class membership. Analysing the shame of debt illustrates how underlying structural economic issues are linked to more personal and emotional ones. It also shows how, in times of crisis and societal change, people might engage in ethical decision-making, that modify their lives. As I have explained in the Introduction, the works of Zigon (2010) and Robbins (2004) present a shift of paradigms in the lives of people in two different settings. In the case of my informants, the experience and consequences of debt and its intersection with shame cannot be understood only through a socio-economic lens, but need to be analysed through the moral shifts and decisions that people are forced to make in order to live with it.

The future, the family: escape versus obligation

Concomitantly with the economic situation, one could argue that women’s stories of migration were by and large structured around a narrative of hope in the future in which they were able to imagine and enact very concrete projects. As Appadurai has stated, “imagination gains a special kind of power in people’s everyday lives... more people in most parts of the world dream of and consider a greater range of possible lives than they have ever done before” (Appadurai cited in Robbins 2006:233). Attributing these possibilities to the effects of globalisation and transnationalism, Appadurai suggests that people more than ever are imagining other possible individual and collective worlds.

Take Juliana, a fifty-year-old woman from Brazil who used to work as a telephonist in Minas Gerais and was earning a bit over the minimum wage, which was R\$ 415,00 (approximately £117) per month in 2008. Back then she and her partner were constructing a house outside Belo Horizonte; she envisioned this house as the place where she would grow old and eventually retire, it had space for animals and an orchard and was away from the city. Yet, the possibility of finishing the house with their income was remote, she knew she needed to migrate in order to make more money to finish her project. Juliana had the advantage of having family abroad, including her youngest son Carlos (26 years old) in London and a second son Rodrigo, in Switzerland (28 years old). Juliana's sisters also lived in the UK, one in London, one in Leicester and one in Essex; she had the advantage that many women did not have, that part of her family was in the UK. Thus migration for Juliana represented a less of a conflict than it did for other women. With family in London she did not have to struggle with finding work or accommodation as other women did. She arrived in London in February 2008 and started working as a domestic worker in different houses over different parts of London. Every penny that she earned was thought of as contributing to a particular aspect, or enhancing a feature of the house. She described the next room she planned to add and the color of the paint she would choose with the money earned, she was slowly imagining and materialising her future dream. As she said once,

In London people like me can reach a different level of life that we could never reach in Brazil. I do not see the same class differences that exist in Brazil here in London. The rich people in Brazil have loads of money, social class is measured by the size of your house and only rich people can afford having a big house in Brazil. My house in Brazil is not going to be huge, but it will be much better with the money I am making here.

Living in London removed her from constant reminders about the stark inequalities of Brazilian society, as she mentions above. Paradoxically, although a telephonist might be seen as higher in status than a domestic servant, the menial work she performed in the houses of the British better-off was degrading her temporarily but would elevate her in the longer term. Migration was a temporary experience that gave her the opportunity to accomplish her long-term and permanent goal: to build her house and hence secure her retirement. Although she talked about the fact that she could not define herself as poor back in Brazil, because she said it would be unfair to do it because of all the "real" poor people in Minas, she considered herself

from a middle class that was struggling to maintain the things and lifestyle she had been working for.

Achieving particular dreams for themselves and their families was a frequent narrative that women recounted. Take for instance, thirty-six-year-old Amanda from Goiânia, Brazil, who used to work as a secondary school teacher back in Brazil. She came to London in 2008 leaving two teenage children behind, Fernando (eighteen years old) and Thais (fourteen years old) under her mother's care in order to make more money for the maintenance of the whole family. As a single mother and without receiving any help from the father of her children, she was facing some difficulties in providing the type of life she wanted for her children. Apart from these economic constraints, her son suffered from chronic depression and had suicidal episodes that required psychological therapy, which represented a huge financial burden. After finding herself with unpaid bills, more bills mounting up and with the feeling that she was failing as a mother - mainly due to her inability to ameliorate Fernando's psychological condition - she decided to migrate. London seemed the best choice, as she already knew people who had migrated to the UK and were by and large making good money. Once in London, after having worked as a domestic worker for some time, Amanda moved into sex work; the money she was making from sex work was aimed at looking after Fernando by paying for his treatment and making sure that both of her children attended good private schools. Her goal was to stay in London until she could make enough money to guarantee university education for Fernando (who was studying graphic design) and eventually pay for Thais' education. According to what she said, this was her legacy to her children; it was the only concrete thing she could do as a good mother. For her, education was an indicator of class difference and therefore allowed people to negotiate better possibilities in the future.⁴³ Even though she mentioned how much she missed her children and how sad she felt about being so far away, she found comfort in knowing that they were in good hands - sometimes she even remarked 'in better hands'- as they were receiving a good education and the care they needed from their grandparents. Despite the evident sadness caused by the distance, Amanda told me she was constantly confronted by 'selfish' feelings of freedom/emancipation. For the first time in a long time, she said, she was having the opportunity to do things she had - because of the fact of being a teenage mother - been denied back in Brazil. Albeit not without

⁴³ As a teacher she believed that education could ameliorate the stark social differences that existed in Brazil for example.

moral conundrums, she was feeling free, and was exploring and understanding who she really was beyond her role as a mother.

The uneasy mix between care for the family and feelings of freedom, as Amanda's story suggests, was expressed by many of my informants. Juliana, for example, told me once that being in London felt like a holiday from previous responsibilities and roles she had to fulfill within her family, 'You know Ana my kids are adults, they are living their lives now, I do not have to worry about them the same way I used to. But, now my mother is old and she is alone, all of my sisters have migrated therefore, me and my brother are the only ones in Brazil to take care of her', she told me. Sometimes she confessed that the task was tiring, as she was required to juggle between making sure that her widowed mother had everything she needed, while at the same time having to attend the needs of her partner, plus dealing with her job and other daily hassles. Even though she stated that the work in London was hard, she also said that it was the first time in her life she had time for herself, to be alone and was not forced to worry about anyone else.

Similar remarks were expressed by Denise (thirty-nine years old) from Goiânia and Monica (thirty three years old) from Minas, Brazil, who felt guilty being released from the daily care of parents and family obligations, although once in London they maintained a flow of remittances back to Brazil. Monica and Denise saw migration as an opportunity to earn money to send back home in order to contribute to the caring of their old parents by buying land and/or constructing a house for the family. It was also an opportunity to gather new experiences and acquire financial independence. Like Juliana, Monica and Denise were the main carers of their aging parents back in Brazil who had no form of social security or pension and hence depended entirely on their children in old age.

Although they justified their migration in terms of care for their families back home, they were simultaneously escaping from the daily obligations by providing care from a long distance. As daughters and members of close family networks, then, women were required to fulfill their obligations within the family as daughters and mothers. Nonetheless the duties attached to these roles that had pigeonholed them back in their countries were transformed with the distance offered by migration. Women, without conflict, arranged new ways to fulfill their obligations of care, and at the same time, they were able to explore the possibilities offered by their newly found freedom. Paradoxically, however, the kinship gendered roles performed with family members were somehow repeated through the roles they had to perform within the occupations

they undertook in London. The difference, besides the cash that they received in exchange for their intimate labour, was due to the fact that caring at work was a form of commoditised care embedded in their new lives and experiences and not in previous roles: aspects that nonetheless created moral conundrums. These are key themes of subsequent chapters.

The emphasis on the individual experience of freedom that my informants narrated could be seen to marry with the approach to migration which focuses on the maximising choices of self-interested individuals (Kearney, 1986:335). At variance with this approach, I have tried to show how there are wider structural issues, social and economic, that oriented them to make these choices. As transnational migrants, my informants not only connected people and places beyond national borders as Glick Schiller (1992:1) has suggested, but also maintained transnational connections that sustained their social roles at a distance, but not without conflict and experiencing personal ruptures. Women's narratives of migration expose a personal conflict between their past lives and present situations, and point to a set of experiences that were lived at a highly individuated level at the same time as being widely shared.

Narratives of uncertain beginnings

The motivations to migrate are never simple or straightforward. Reasons often intertwine complex structural problems back in their countries of origin with personal motivations that range from investing in the future to running away from the past. In this last section I will present the stories of women in two contrasting frameworks. On the one hand I will explain narratives tinted by a sense of uncertainty and adventure. On the other hand, in sharp contrast, I will present narratives coloured by painful memories. Although I will not unveil all of them for reasons of confidentiality, the stories that I was allowed to narrate suggest that migration also functioned as a way to cope with the past for the sake of the future in a more personal, intimate and sometimes painful way.

Leaving the past behind

The above can be illustrated by the story of forty-three-year-old Sabrina from Sao Paulo, Brazil, who after ending an eleven year-long marriage wanted to make a fresh start with her adopted son Alex (then aged nine years old) in London. Alex had been a street child in Sao Paulo when he was little and had been at the orphanage for almost three years before Sabrina adopted him. As Sabrina told me, no one wanted a seven-year-old child, 'they all want babies, that is why I wanted Alex'. Despite the intensity of her feelings about this, Sabrina's husband could not cope with the adoption and eventually left both of them. With no marriage to account for, Sabrina foresaw migration as a temporary state in which she and Alex could locate themselves in the new relationship of mother and son. It was, as she said, a fresh start for both. She arrived in London with Alex in 2007, worked as domestic worker before moving into sex work after which she was forced to send Alex back to Sao Paulo with her aunt and mother. Sabrina's dream, which started as a project that included Alex converted into a personal challenge - albeit still linked to Alex's future - to earn a million *Reales* before going back to Brazil. The financial success that migration offered imposed new aspirations that were driving her away from Alex. Ironically, what started as a journey of kinship recognition, terminated in a long distance separation that could potentially have consequences in the short term. Yet, in the long term, she was convinced that the separation from her son would bear fruit that they would eventually enjoy in the future and would justify her absence.

Similar narratives of painful separation from children were told by many of my informants, who at different times in their lives were required to make tough choices regarding family and migration. Thirty-two-year-old Angelica from Brasilia had left her twelve-year-old daughter Viviane after a painful divorce. She wanted to migrate in order to secure the future of her daughter, she assured me that there were few opportunities for someone like her, with only high school education, back in Brazil. When she decided to migrate her ex-husband asked for the shared custody of the girl and took her under his care. She initially migrated to Portugal in 2003 and after being deported in 2005, found her way to the UK in the same year. Even though it was painful for her to think about her daughter back in Brazil, she constantly said that it was probably for the best, as she thought of herself as a bad mother. Angelica's narratives regarding her

migration were painful to listen to, as they were filled with sorrow and guilt. There was a fissure in her life that she tried to cover in different ways, in most cases unsuccessfully.

In similar vein, Cristina (fifty five years old) from Ecuador, who had migrated to Spain more than fifteen years ago, came alone and after two years of living in Madrid brought her two daughters and her son to live with her. Cristina's migration to Europe was driven partly by economic motivation, but also by more painful personal reasons regarding her former marriage to an alcoholic, abusive man who according to her was ruining her life as well as the lives of her children back in Ecuador. She talked about her decision to migrate not as economic but deeply emotional. She explained how much she missed her comfortable middle class life in Ecuador and how, in this regard, having migrated felt like a huge sacrifice. However, according to her, the sacrifice, in most part, had turned out to be fruitful since her children had grown up in Spain, held Spanish passports and now, as adults (Mario thirty four years old, Paola thirty two years old and Jasmine twenty one years old) had the opportunity to choose whatever they wanted to do with their lives. Nevertheless, for the second time in her life Cristina decided to migrate in order to offer her youngest daughter Jasmine better opportunities for her future in London. According to Cristina, Jasmine was quite a rebellious girl who challenged her constantly and was starting to get into trouble in Madrid by mixing with the wrong people; that is Latin American gangs around the neighbourhood where they lived. In order to avoid the impending disaster she made the decision to leave her life in Madrid and bring Jasmine to London to learn and appreciate life the hard way, as she called it. 'If Jasmine does not want to study she would then have to work, and if domestic work is the only thing she can do right now, domestic work it is', she said. She remembered how painful it was to see her daughter working as a domestic worker, however she felt this was a necessary lesson in order for Jasmine to mature and appreciate the sacrifices that she had made for her children.

Cristina's migration to London was expressed in terms of 'starting from scratch, doing it all over again', she told me; and even though it was a hard choice, coming to London represented a twofold advantage, a better life for her daughter and a new beginning for her. It was, as she stated, a second chance in her life to make things better; but this time instead of having to take care for her children she was taking care of herself and was planning to make arrangements for her future. 'I am not a young woman anymore and even though I have worked all my life I do not have a pension. Now it is time to save money for my future'. Her plan was to save money, go back

to Ecuador and construct a rustic eco-hotel in a piece of land by the beach that belonged to the family and recuperate some of the social status that she had lost and belonged to her family. This was her retirement provision.

For some, then, leaving the past behind was the only possibility of imagining and enacting a different future. For some women the past included painful experiences that they preferred to conceal. Their narratives of migration, as a consequence, remain silent and excluded from my own narrative. These silences suggest that those things that women wanted to conceal were intended to be buried in their past, back in their countries. As Angelica once told me, 'we all carry our ghosts, and even at a distance they sometimes keep on haunting us'. If the painful and conflicted past became a pivotal reason to migrate, the future and the hopes in investing in a different future certainly reinforced their choice to migrate. In sharp contrast, in what follows I will narrate the stories of women who saw migration not as an escape from the past, but as an adventurous pause in their present lives.

New life and sense of adventure

In the collective imaginary of many of the people that I encountered during fieldwork, London was portrayed not only as the place of opportunities but as the place where one could learn, what many of my informants called "real English". In Latin America the learning of the English language is still regarded as a skill that could improve job prospects, especially among the middle classes. Young women usually explained migration as a temporary state in their lives in which they could learn a new language and gain new experiences. In a city like London English schools were powerful magnets that attracted international students from all ages, from all over the world. Moreover, until 2012, English students were able to work part time on their student visas, an aspect that opened the doors for thousands of migrants into the city.⁴⁴ As some studies suggest, Latin American migrants required no or very little English to survive in London, hence its attraction. Very few of my informants, having started with negligible English language skills,

⁴⁴ Nowadays the law states that, "you are not allowed to work in the UK if you are on a course at any level with an education provider that is not a UK higher education institution or a publicly funded further education college". <http://www.workpermit.com/news/2012-04-19/uk/uk-tier4-student-visa-work-rights.htm>. Accessed on the 31st of October 2013.

realised the ambition of improving them, and those who had managed to learn some English were far from fluent. But women still maintain the hope and invest money in trying to learn the language. Learning English and thus having better job prospects back in Brazil was the goal of Mariana, a thirty-eight-year-old single woman from Sao Paulo. In addition to learning English she was motivated by her wish to travel around Europe. She studied Marketing at university and used to work for a firm in the state of Maringa. She was quite satisfied with her work and did not have real economic problems, yet as a single woman in Brazil in her late thirties she was feeling the pressure of not being married. She told me she had had a difficult break-up with her previous boyfriend, who proceeded to marry someone else immediately after the end of their relationship. She was heartbroken and felt that she needed a change in her life, as a result she decided to leave Brazil for a while, to search for new experiences and in the meantime learn a new language that might help her in the future. The trip was both an escape and an adventure. Since Mariana had an Italian grandmother she initially migrated to Italy in order to sort out her Italian citizenship. As she told me, she did not intend to stay in Italy, but while she was waiting until her papers were sorted out, she decided to make the most of it. She took some Italian lessons and sporadically worked as a waitress in order to make some money for her daily expenses. In the meantime Mariana met a Colombian man named Julio. Four months after they started dating they decided to get married. As Mariana recalls, her life had taken a 360-degree turn: from being the spinster back in Brazil she had become a woman married to a foreigner in a foreign country, she said. However, in 2008 with the economic crisis and with no job prospects, Mariana decided to move to London in order to work and save some money before going back to Brazil. The plan included coming with her stepdaughter, twenty-two-year old Nathaly, and her husband Julio who was also struggling in Italy because of lack of employment. They had agreed to meet up in London after Mariana and Nathaly had found jobs and a place to live. I met Mariana just after she arrived to London, she was working as a domestic worker/nanny and was looking for a flat where the three of them could live; from that moment her dreams and expectations switched and were focused on constructing a home with her husband either in Italy, London or Brazil. Ironically, Mariana's dream of learning English was never fulfilled; nonetheless her dreams and aspiration altered the moment she found herself in love. She ended up fulfilling an entirely different dream.

In a rather different vein, yet with some echoes of this, twenty-seven-year old Vanessa did attend English classes in London, and by the end of two years managed to understand and speak

- although not fluently - some English. Vanessa came from a middle-class family in Colombia that supported her dream of coming to London; her studies and expenses were fully paid by her father who thought, as Vanessa recalls, that English would help his daughter in finding a better job once she went back to Colombia. As an English student, Vanessa held a student visa therefore was able to work part time, time that she initially used to work as a cleaner for a few months until she slowly moved into sex work. For Vanessa being in London represented the opportunity to acquire new experiences and, with luck, meet a potential romantic partner. Like other women, to whom I have already referred, Vanessa felt free from the social gendered prejudices that prevailed in Colombia. When she started working as a prostitute she commented to me that she felt no moral pressure as a result of working in the sex work industry. She enjoyed being on the game and receiving constant attention from men. But it was a profession she would never have dared to work in back in Colombia. Vanessa's initial dreams were slowly modified by her current experiences and personal circumstances in London. This aspect was not unique to Vanessa's experience but was present to some degree in the stories of all my informants.

For Mariana and Vanessa, migration implied a completely different enterprise than it did for the rest of the women I have described. Differences in age, motivations to migrate and hopes for the future had a fundamental impact on the way in which their lives unfolded in London.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented an introduction to some of the characters that appear in this thesis. I have explained the narratives of their motivations to migrate as they were explained to me. As Katy Gardner suggests, "Narratives are thus central ways in which 'we' as outsiders might attempt to understand their experiences, for narratives both reflect history, experience and meanings, and help shape them" (2002-27). The analysis of narratives is useful to help solve the problem of trying to analyse how structural and personal factors conjoin. I have shown how women's narratives do not lack and are not emptied of the socio-cultural context in which they are constructed. They contain remembrances of the past, as well as the experience of the present, and in some cases they are coloured by the hopes of the future. These narratives will slowly unfold throughout this thesis and will reveal the experiences of the women in my research.

The chapter has focused on women's narratives of migration. This prepares ground for the focus of the remainder of the thesis: how women's lives unfold and are shaped by the changes they undergo in London. The next chapter turns to a consideration of how the structural aspects of the immigration law intersect and shape women's lives. The following chapter introduces the reader to the first challenge that women, who did not have the proper documents, faced as migrants. It talks about the first changes and personal adaptations - within illegality - with which women engaged in order to locate themselves in their new lives.

Chapter Three

Everyday experiences of illegality

While waiting for the bus, Sarita looks around her. She looks to her right, left, front and behind, always checking that there are no police officers in sight. She is impatiently waiting for the bus to come, she talks to me in a low voice, almost whispering without losing sight of the space around her. She asks me about the day of the week. I tell her it is Wednesday. She asks again if I am sure. I say yes and ask why she is worried about the day. She tells me that she has paid for a weekly bus pass, which she updates every Monday, but she is always worried about forgetting to top up her Oyster card and not having enough money to travel. Then she adds - something that I have also heard from other informants - that she has heard from friends that many *ilegales* (illegals) are caught by the police and eventually sent to detention centres because they did not pay for their bus or train fare. Even though buses are a constant source of anxiety, Sarita was forced to take them in order to commute in the city and get to the different places where she worked during the day. After waiting at the bus stop for ten minutes the bus arrives and Sarita is ready to step inside, with her Oyster card firmly gripped in her right hand and her bag in the other. We enter the bus and she touches the Oyster electronic device without looking at the driver, moves inside the bus and climbs to the second level. We find two seats together and sit down. Although I try to talk to her and ask her questions about her day at work, Sarita's eyes dart around and she continues to have a guarded and distracted air. Sometimes she crosses herself and whispers for help to God. Even though she is tired from working all day, I know that she cannot relax until she reaches her final destination, home.

Like many other migrants, Sarita described and experienced her ventures into the city, particularly while commuting, as tense moments in which she was exposed to the glare of public view and the potential threat of being caught by the police. Stories about experiences of detention fuelled a sense of anxiety among many Latin American migrants and became part of their collective knowledge of the city. For Sarita, like so many others, buses and commuting

became an on-going source of anxiety, thanks to this collective knowledge of illegality and because of the presence of the Transport for London (TFL) authorities who occasionally get on the buses to carry out random checks on peoples' tickets and passes. On some occasions when finding that people had not paid the correct fare, they would ask for IDs, leading to other questions that could expose migrants' vulnerabilities. In many cases, as I eventually realised during fieldwork, TFL authorities could be gateways to deportation because they frequently called the Home Office when they thought that a migrant could be undocumented. For Sarita, the thought of being asked for her bus pass or Oyster card created uneasiness and apprehension because she felt that her face would reveal the fact that she did not have papers; she subsequently explained that she felt sometimes as if she had the word *illegal* (illegal) tattooed on her forehead.

For many, hiding the 'illegal look' and the anxiety that they felt on the streets was an everyday challenge that they had to manage. Ultimately their desire was to become as invisible as they could in order to remain unseen by the police and by other people who might be able to see their illegality. Indeed, despite their fear, remaining invisible in London was not too difficult as it was relatively easy to dissolve into the multicultural landscape of the city. The presence of the police, the sense of being under constant surveillance, the threat of deportation and the embodiment of illegality reinforced their invisibility. As I described in Sarita's case, riding the bus entailed a huge challenge that altered her mental state and her physical body. Besides the nervousness she experienced every time she took the bus, Sarita modified her behaviour on the bus by not talking or only whispering. She sat on her seat and remained very quiet for the duration of the journey; even her body seemed to sink into the seat, as if she wanted to produce a mimetic exchange with it. Sarita's exposure to the public space and the threat of deportation placed her in what Susan Coutin has called "spaces of nonexistence",

On a day-to-day basis, their illegality may be irrelevant to most of their activities, only becoming an issue in certain contexts, such as when changing jobs, applying for college, or encountering an immigration official. The undocumented thus move in and out of existence. Much of the time they are undifferentiated from those around them, but suddenly, when legal reality is superimposed on daily life, they are once more in a space of nonexistence. The borders between existence and nonexistence remain blurred and permeable (Coutin 2000:40).

Coutin further explains that undocumented migrants enter such spaces not only when they cross borders without authorisation, as many of her Salvadoran informants did in the US., but also when they get involved in clandestine activities. Migrants enter such spaces when they enter the field of illegality. Their experiences of illegality were framed within an alternation between spaces of existence and those of nonexistence. Because of their undocumented or semi-legal status they felt as though they had become something other than their real selves: as though they had been required to make choices - being undocumented and working without or with false papers - that collided with what they previously thought of as right and wrong. By taking into account my informants' personal experiences, I want to demonstrate how the different discourses and practices of illegality shaped them as different kinds of persons, inhabiting these different spaces of "non-existence". This became, in turn, a new way of existence: one which was temporary or semi-permanent, but was mediated and intensified by a sense of deportability. According to Nicholas De Genova "illegality is lived through a palpable sense of deportability – the possibility of deportation, which is to say, the possibility of being removed from the space of the [US nation-state]" any nation state, in this case (De Genova, 2004: 161); deportability is then a strategy used by the authorities to render illegal migrants as a distinctly disposable community.⁴⁵ It has a degree of success, - as it creates vulnerable individuals - as I will demonstrate: but not so much as to be all-pervasive or hegemonic.

It is through the understanding of this intermittent sense of deportability experienced by my informants whenever they were forced to cross the border between spaces of existence and nonexistence that I structure the analysis of their everyday experiences of illegality in London. The idea and experience of illegality, which is produced by the state (De Genova 2002, 2004, 2010; Coutin, 2005; Malher 1995), creates temporary subjects - people suspended in limbo (Coutin 2005) - who are required to develop new dispositions (physical, mental and social) in order to cope with their new status. Being deportable implies the constitution of a subject that can be removed at any moment regardless of attachments to a particular place, of being rooted in that place, and whose dreams and future aspirations can thereby be cancelled. Therefore, the threat of deportation as well as moving within spaces of existence and nonexistence becomes

⁴⁵ De Genova argues that the production of illegality provides an apparatus for sustaining Mexican migrants' vulnerability and tractability – as workers whose labour power, inasmuch as it is deportable, becomes an eminently disposable commodity (2004:166). Although I am aware that the UK immigration law is different from that of the US, the current labour restrictions as well as the recent policies, laws, policing and interventions used to deport and publicly criminalised migrants in the UK are indeed exposing them as a disposable community.

embodied and is manifested through an alternating state of fear and uncertainty.

This chapter thus seeks to explore the creation of a particular migrant person, the undocumented person, who is in important respects different from who they were before migrating. If we want to analyse the so-called illegality in depth and understand how - beyond the formal legal and political realm - people are affected by such a status, we must focus on the nuances of migrants' experiences of illegality. Illegality does not only affect the external structure of migrants' worlds but also shapes their subjective experience of time, space, embodiment, sociality and self (Willen, 2007:9). The tensions felt by migrants were a combination of the future prospects of becoming undocumented before actually being illegal as they all held tourist or student visas at the beginning of their stay in the UK.

Not all of my informants were undocumented or semi-legal; some of them had acquired European passports before coming to London by claiming ancestry, or through amnesties provided by different countries to regularise "illegal" migration, particularly Spain. However, some of those who held European passports had experienced a phase of illegality in their lives in Europe. The experiences of being undocumented, or moving between illegality and legality, were familiar experiences in the lives of my informants. In this chapter I am focusing in particular on those people who were undocumented, or semi-legal or even in some cases "over documented",⁴⁶ and were thus clustering at the illegal end of the scale, at the time of my study.⁴⁷

Illegal migration for the Home Office is understood as:

...a collective term for many forms of abuse of the immigration rules. It may be entering the country illegally - by attempting to get through the controls we have overseas, or at our border through fraudulent or clandestine entry - or by breaking the immigration rules in the UK - by working full time having been allowed in to study, or by failing to leave at the end of their stay (Home Office 2007:8).

Illegal migration constitutes an alien-like subject who by virtue of his "lack" of proper documentation is a potential criminal. In this regard, it is interesting to see how the Immigration Act (Section 24 of Immigration Act 1971) defines the different types of immigration-related

⁴⁶ Over documented refers to those cases in which people held more than one document regardless of being genuine or false, i.e, national insurance numbers, tourist visas, student visas or false passports.

⁴⁷ Only two of my informants held British citizenship, Felipa from Mexico and Tita from Ecuador. They acquired their citizenship after being in London for more than 20 years. They were the only cases in my research who were brought by employers from their respective countries under the domestic work visa scheme.

offences which are sanctioned under criminal law. Although they are sanctioned under criminal law these offences are almost never prosecuted, with the exception of the use of false documents. Whatever the geographic or historic context, the term illegal entails the criminalisation of a specific subject, of a subject that is undesirable according to the state. Illegal subjects are constructed by the state through definitions and legal frameworks and also is “ultimately sustained as the ideological effect of a discursive formation encompassing broader public debate and political struggle” (De Genova 2004:167). Nonetheless these definitions do not necessarily directly correlate with an individual’s experiences, ideas of illegality and law.

This chapter refers to the “illegal” subject as an undocumented or semi-legal person who *experiences* illegality. I refer to semi-legal as the state in-between illegality and legality, in which migrants had documentation that granted them some legal status but were – for different reasons - involved in illicit practices. Although there were occasions on which migrants referred to themselves as “illegal” –particularly when they faced the limitations of their status and therefore entered into spaces of nonexistence – generally described themselves simply as migrants. As a result I will refer to them as undocumented in order to avoid the criminal and alien connotations that the term “illegal” entails.⁴⁸ My use of the term illegality responds to its “criminal” and “unlawful” connotations, specified through state law, but affecting the subjectivities of those categorized in this way. Using this term thus acknowledges the way in which people think and reflect on it, and consequently its effects on people’s lives.

The journey towards illegality

The constitution of the undocumented person began long before my informants’ arrival in London. From the moment women decided to migrate to the UK, their narratives related to planning and eventually traveling exposed the implications of becoming illegal migrants in the country of destination. Such narratives demonstrate how the new status was imagined well before they became illegal migrants (*c.f.* Coutin 2005), given, in the particular case of my

⁴⁸ The academic literature has used many different categories to define so-called “illegal” migrants: unauthorised migrants (Coutin 2000); deportees with unrecognised legal claims (De Genova and Peutz 2010); semi compliant (Ruhs and Anderson 2010); learning to be illegal (Gonzalez 2011); legally illegal (Rigo 2011), illegal (Willen 2007) among others.

fieldwork, that they *entered* the UK with the proper documentation and visas. Having arrived with a tourist or student visa, it was only later, once they overstayed their visas and disappeared from the system, that they became undocumented. When entering the UK as visitors, nationals from certain countries need to have a valid visitor visa issued in their country of origin (Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Bolivia and Venezuela), while those from Brazil, Mexico and Honduras are given entry clearance at the port of entry. According to a study, overstaying the visa is routine for Latin Americans entering the UK: 70% came in with a different immigration status to their current status; more than three quarters with a tourist/visitor visa and another 10% with student visas, later becoming overstayers. It was found that 19% of the total were migrants living irregularly in London, with the caveat that 93% of this group had entered the country legally. It was also found that only 3% of the 960 people interviewed entered with false passports (McIlwaine, et. al 2010:49-50).

We must, however, analyse these data with the caveat that such narratives might be a reflection of the discomfort they developed through subsequent years and experiences of illegality in London. Still, these narratives of an uncertain journey towards illegality are an expression of memories that constitute an important part of their eventual lives in London.

Deception was a part of migrants' interactions with the authorities and with their friends. Such was the case of Jovanna, who arrived in Paris in September of 2003 pretending to be a tourist. Bolivian citizens are not required to hold a tourist visa in order to visit France. (This was also the case for those visiting the UK until May 2009 when the rules changed for Bolivian citizens as well as other nationalities.) In Paris, Jovanna met a friend who had no idea about the real intentions of Jovanna's trip. For her it was inconceivable to disclose her real intentions, as she did not want to be humiliated by telling the truth: that she was migrating in order to pay off debts and support her family back in Bolivia. Such a reality had not been part of her life's plan, she told me, and so she was reluctant to expose her new social status in front of a friend she had not seen in many years. Maintaining the pretence allowed Jovanna to keep her previous social status while at the same time hiding her intentions about a future life in London. She knew she would be required to work as a domestic worker or cleaner, jobs she had never done before and never thought that she would end up doing. Moreover, she also knew that she would enter the realm of illegality by overstaying her visa and working.

For Jovanna, as for many of my informants, migration represented the acceptance of a life that entailed downward status mobility because of the contradiction between the work they would have to do and the lives they were leaving behind. A middle-class life in which they owned their house, sent their children to private schools and were, as a group, located in a higher social and racial position vis-a-vis the poor (indigenous, blacks, or peasants) people of their countries. Although many of them accumulated more debt as a result of migration, they talked about London as a place where they could achieve some of their middle class dreams. Because of this social class background, women saw themselves as higher in status than other “illegal” migrants, like those who cross the border of Mexico to get to the US. They saw themselves as different from those people who were smuggled by “*polleros*” or “*coyotes*”, or from those who had to cross the river or the desert. As Jovanna told me once, ‘At least I had something to eat, I had a house, not like the people from your country (referring to Mexico) that have to flee in order to survive’. My informants, in contrast to those that Jovanna imagined, entered into illegality as tourists and arrived by plane.

Despite the fact that they experienced themselves as higher status than such “poor peasants” running away from their countries because of poverty, the moment of facing authorities at the border and lying about their real intentions produced concerns and shame about doing something illicit. These feelings and thoughts became more real when women were subjected to scrutiny by border officials at the port of entry. When Jovanna eventually entered the UK, she described the fear she felt the moment she had to face the Border Agency (BA) officers and answer their questions – especially when she could not understand what they were asking. For others the most frightening moment was when they had to provide evidence of a return ticket back to their countries, proof that they had enough money to pay for their expenses while visiting London and answering a long interrogation about their lives, family and occupations back in their countries of origin. As Jovanna explained to me:

You don’t even want to look them in the eye directly because you feel as if they can read the truth in your eyes and they will know you are lying. It is very difficult to keep yourself in control in front of immigration authorities and stick to your story, we have no choice but to do it, make up a story and make it believable. We have to pretend that we are respectable tourists, who are just traveling like any other tourist. This is the moment when you start feeling like an illegal migrant.

Women planned and developed elaborate lies that required the investment of money in "tourist trips" around Europe before entering to the UK to avoid any suspicion. Many of my informants traveled to Paris or Barcelona, stayed there for a few days, even though this represented a considerable economic investment, and eventually entered the UK by bus or train. By proving at the UK border that they had been traveling in Europe and including London as part of their trip, women felt that they were less likely to be questioned about their whereabouts and intentions, and would therefore have more chance of getting to London. At the same time, by constructing the status of the tourist, women reclaimed parts of their social identities and delayed their future identity as semi-legal or undocumented migrants.

Let me illustrate the above with the story of Sonia. As I have explained in the previous chapter, she came to London in 2007 in order to work and be able to pay off her debts. Back in Tarija (Bolivia), London was advertised by different travel agencies as an ideal destination to find job opportunities. Many travel agencies claimed to offer the plane ticket plus the acquisition of a working visa and accommodation in London for \$6,000 USD. These travel agencies were markedly astute and canny in smuggling future "illegal" migrants, through different routes all over the UK, under "legal" circumstances.⁴⁹ As noted earlier, until March 2009 Bolivian citizens were allowed to come to the UK without having to apply for a visa prior to their arrival; their tourist visa was granted at the port of entry, therefore Sonia did not have to obtain her visa until she arrived in the UK. Sonia's odyssey to London started in Edinburgh, where she was instructed to face the UKBA officer by herself and pretend that she was traveling alone and visiting the UK. After a long interrogation about her trip, UKBA officers granted her a three months tourist visa allowing her to enter the country. Once in Scotland, the trip involved traveling by taxi from Edinburgh all the way to London because, according to the "tour guides", it was dangerous to travel by train or coach as immigration officers checked for illegal migrants in such transports. 'The funny thing is that we had our visas; we were not illegal! We were so scared and stupid! Back then I did not even think about my visa and I am supposed to be an educated woman' Sonia laughed. Regardless of the legal status of their clients, these "tourist guides" efficiently made use of the discourse and anxieties produced by the idea of illegality in order to take advantage of the group and charge \$6,000 per person for the "services provided".

⁴⁹ Without taking into account that they were defrauding hundreds of migrants with their "services" and effectively function as the so-called "coyotes".

After traveling from Edinburgh to Newcastle and then to Manchester the “tour guides” disappeared and left the whole group alone, clueless about their whereabouts in the UK. No one spoke English except for one person. This person, a man, had limited knowledge but managed to communicate to the driver of a minivan, explaining that they wanted to get to London. When the minivan driver asked them about where in London they wanted to go, without any knowledge or resources they asked the driver to take them to the only place that, according to Sonia sounded logical in their minds, they asked the driver to take them to the “*Plaza Central*” (Central Plaza) of the city of London. As Sonia recalls, the taxi driver was completely bewildered by the request and after several attempts at communicating with them decided to take them to Victoria Station. Once outside Victoria they did not want to remain together because of the fear previously planted in them by the tour guides, who had stressed how big groups would attract the attention of the police. Sonia commented on how terrified the whole group were, feeling defenseless and ignorant. Although they were not in fact “illegal”, the future prospect of becoming so was already imprinted in their minds and intertwined with their own personal plans of overstaying their tourist visas in London.

This story echoed those of many Latin American women in London who decided to move continents in order to solve their economic situation. Regardless of their previous social status, educational background and expectations for the future, they were all immersed in the intricate prospects of illegality. At the moment when the migration plan started unfolding they were already, early on, required to think about their future illegality. As this suggests, becoming an undocumented migrant entailed a particular temporality which was framed by the different phases of the migration journey and final destination; but it was there in essence from the start. Although my informants were not initially “*clandestinos*” - unlike many other migrants who do not have the possibility of obtaining a visa to enter into the new country - the future prospects of illegality also had an impact on their future personhoods. The fact that they held visas and therefore were not categorised as “illegals” before eventually becoming undocumented allowed them to discursively sustain a different status from other “illegal” migrants. Nonetheless, their initial legal status in London compounded by a middle-class status – followed by the dislocations that emerged with the decline in status- affected the way they experienced illegality. In attempting to tackle and fully grasp the experiences of illegality of migrants, we must thus take into account the temporal dimension of the migration enterprise in the production of the person

who will become an undocumented migrant.

The following section explores how they became entwined in illegality because of the desire for a good life, or for a life in which they would be able to sustain their middle-class aspirations. I will present the process in which good, middle-class people – who thought of themselves as different from other migrants - learned how to deal with their new social identities as undocumented migrants stepping into different forms of illegality.

Learning illegality

Once in London women migrants had to learn how to negotiate and co-exist with other people (undocumented, semi-legal or fully “above board”) in the process of inhabiting and sustaining the embodiment of their new legal and social identity as undocumented subjects. To achieve this, women were required to implement illicit strategies in order to get access to different services, but mainly to get work. Although these strategies were recurrent because of labour limitations and economic demands, the initial decision to break the law entailed a moral conundrum. Just as they never imagined themselves working as sex or domestic workers, which implied downward status mobility as well as personal moral problems, they found unlawful practices challenging and alien to them. As I will explain in further chapters, their moralities collided with the demands and circumstances of their new lives and specifically their new status in London. Their present situation demanded the performance of necessary and uncomfortable unlawful actions – albeit necessary - and therefore the creation of new dispositions and skills. These new skills entailed different levels of deception that ranged from the construction of complex lies and different life histories for consumption by acquaintances and employers in London, to the enactment of actions that went beyond the mere legal status. In what follows I explore the new dispositions and skills that semi-legal and undocumented migrants developed in London within the social spaces of illegality.

Women migrants and in some cases their family members embodied aspects of their new status through individual actions such as the manipulation of false documents, subletting of papers, breaching the restrictions of their student visas and engaging in clandestine occupations (in addition to the phony marriage arrangements that are discussed in Chapter Four). In what

follows, I explore how their new legal identity was not only limited by the lack of proper visas and passports, but was further enacted and contested by learning how to surmount the boundaries and regulations imposed by the legal system. However, we must take into account that these practices were restricted by limited options, peoples' choices were highly constrained. My informants' choices led them to the enactment of unlawful actions that did not change the structure of power that controlled their lives in so many ways. Moreover, because of these choices, women experienced guilt and moral conflict that was not necessarily conducive to empowerment. Therefore, these practices could be seen more as tactics which enable people to adapt to the environment and "take advantage of occasions and depend upon these occasions" and which exploit creative opportunities in everyday practices (De Certeau 2000:43). What I refer to as tactics (under the light of De Certeau 1984 and Foucault 1972, 1978), should be understood as coping mechanisms that are an intrinsic part of peoples' relation to the state (for example regarding their illegal status) and their relationships with other people. Women were "resisting" through those tactics, since they were ultimately not able to change or challenge the power relations that existed between them and the state or their employers/clients. Nonetheless, the women exercised some form of agency at particular moments through these short-term tactics. Therefore, learning new skills on the margins of the law was used as a way of creating possibilities for themselves, even though deploying such practices could simultaneously place them in spaces of non-existence. As the manipulation of the law augments their possibilities for deportation, one could argue that these tactics – as moments – contain a contradiction. They are moments of opportunities as well as moments when migrants experience an intermittent deportability.

Manipulating documents

Let me take you back to the moment Sonia was left at Victoria Station. While deliberating over where to go or what to do next, the group tried to ask a bus driver about the location of the Latin American neighbourhood (*barrio*), but they could not communicate and did not receive any answer from bus drivers. After being stranded at the bus stop, a woman from Ecuador who overheard their queries came to their aid and took them to Elephant and Castle in South London. Once in Elephant and Castle, the woman contacted a Colombian man who knew about houses

where the group could rent rooms to stay.⁵⁰ The group's members then found accommodation in various houses and, according to Sonia, it was the last time they saw each other as a group. Sonia moved to a shared room in a house in South London where other Latin Americans lived. After a few days of being in London she managed to sublet the papers, that is the National Insurance Number (NIN), of a woman who was going back to Bolivia. This was a common practice among people who wanted to accumulate benefits, taxes and get a pension later on by sustaining their residence in the country. This practice was known as *dejar los papeles trabajando* (keep the papers working) and it was commonly used among Latin Americans (see McIlwaine et.al. 2012). Even though using other people's identities helped to guarantee a steady income, it also represented big risks in terms of trust as it was easy for savvy people to defraud others by subletting papers while retaining their salary. These experiences augmented the sense of mistrust and disloyalty that already persisted in the Latin American community; the enemy was not the state or employers but other migrants (as I will show in this chapter and in Chapter Seven).

The easy access to and use of National Insurance Numbers was due to a mutual compliance between employers and employees (*c.f.* Ruhs and Anderson 2008), allowing migrants to secure "legal" jobs in London despite their illegal situation while at the same time allowing employers, on many occasions, to take advantage of workers (McIlwaine 2007, Datta et. al 2007, Wills et. al 2009) by not paying the minimum wage or by retaining wages. Sonia with her new documents, and in compliance with her employers, was able to work in five different places as a cleaner during the day in Central London. Her salary was deposited in the bank account of the National Insurance Number holder, who deducted eighty pounds a month from the total for the subletting of the papers. For Sonia the transaction of renting papers provided her with a guaranteed and steady income for a year and a half. Even though she was using the papers of another person, the employers could prove (in paper) that they were complying with the requisites of the law.⁵¹ During this time Sonia was able to pay half of her debts back in Bolivia. Unfortunately, Sonia was hit by a taxi in February of 2009 on Oxford Street at five in the morning

⁵⁰ Elephant and Castle is considered to be a Latin American enclave in London, even though it includes migrant groups from all over London. It is now a middle class mixed race area of the city quite close to the Centre. At the core of Elephant and Castle there is a shopping centre where different migrant groups sell different things. In recent years the area has been gentrified through the construction of luxury flats.

⁵¹ As I will explain further in this chapter, this was before the law was changed in order to monitor employers and fine them for employing "illegal" migrants.

on her way to her first working shift. She sustained serious injuries including two broken legs and a fractured collarbone. It was only during the three months she spent recovering in the hospital that she was discovered by the Home Office. She had overstayed her visa and was considered an “illegal” migrant by the UKBA authorities. However, because of her injuries and her disability, Sonia was entitled to receive assistance from the state. Under the National Assistance Act (1948) local authorities have to help people in need and/or sick.⁵² They provide a safety net for people that are unable to take care of themselves for various reasons (see Ticktin 2011 for a similar case in France).⁵³ The help is provided to people that have an outstanding application at the Home Office at the very least. Thanks to this exception to the rule, whereby those without status could access support, Sonia received medical treatment from the NHS, a house to live in and professional care for more than two years, time during during which her visa application was pending. Ironically the revelation of her undocumented status permitted her to temporarily locate herself within a temporary space of existence, which although surveilled, gave her the opportunity to construct a social life in London. After the accident, Sonia was contacted by people from the Catholic Church who paid regular visits to her. In contrast with her initial life in London where she was an invisible cleaner working throughout the nights and days, she constructed a social life and learned to live in two parallel worlds.

Others came to the UK already prepared with false papers. Even though Sarita entered the UK with her Honduran passport and was granted a tourist visa, she had acquired a “Spanish” passport while in Spain, for which she had paid £200, because she was told it was the best and easiest way to find a stable job. Using the passport, she was successful in obtaining a job at a cleaning company. However, she could not cope with the anxieties created by the use of this document and after a few months, Sarita decided to work as a domestic worker in private houses where she was not required to provide any documentation. She was so frightened about the false document that she kept it hidden in a special envelope glued to the back of a drawer. When she showed me the document on one occasion, even though we were at her flat, she let me see it for a

⁵² National Assistance Act (1948), Section 21 Duty of local authorities to provide accommodation. Subject to and in accordance with the provisions of this Part of this Act, a local authority may with the approval of the Secretary of State, and to such extent as he may direct shall, make arrangements for providing residential accommodation for persons [aged eighteen or over] who by reason of age, [illness, disability] or any other circumstances are in need of care and attention which is not otherwise available to them. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/11-12/29/section/21>

⁵³ The other exception is for children in need or at risk. Details are found under the Children Act of 1989. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/part/III>

brief moment before she started feeling anxious and asked me to give it back so she could put it back in its hidden spot where she hoped no one would find it. It was as if the document was burning Sarita's hands, it was something she did not want to touch. She was constantly worried about possessing this document and even had dreams about the police coming to the flat, finding the document and sending her to prison (see Kelly 2006, Navaro-Yashin 2007 and Pelkmans 2013 for similar cases).

In a rather different vein, yet with some echoes of this, using false documents was an option some people chose the moment they found themselves in the UK with no possibilities of acquiring a real job permit. Let me illustrate this with the example of Pedro and Lourdes from Cochabamba, Bolivia. Like Sonia, they were attracted by the promises of work which were advertised by a "tourist/ work" agency in Bolivia. Pedro arrived in the UK in June of 2002, spurred on by the promise from the agency of obtaining a working visa and a job in a fruit factory in Spalding. The visa turned out to be a false Italian document that cost him £300. Although at the beginning Pedro refused to work with a forged document, he soon realised that it was his only option in order to get a job in one of the factories in Spalding. After two years of working in the UK, he decided to bring his family with him: his wife Lourdes and their two sons. The family's journey to the UK was analogous to the trips that Jovanna and Sonia experienced. In order to appear less suspicious in the eyes of the UKBA officers they staged a tourist visit before coming to the UK. Once in Spalding, Lourdes applied for an English student visa, which in 2003 was still possible to obtain. This afforded Pedro the possibility of having a partner with him in the country who would be permitted to work in a full-time job⁵⁴. Meanwhile, Pedro worked as a cleaner in a factory using his fake ID. He found it increasingly difficult, however, to get work because of the massive migration of Polish people to the UK after that country's accession to the EU. Many Polish migrants were taking up jobs previously performed by illegal migrants. While Pedro and Lourdes were waiting for the resolution of Lourdes' student visa in November 2004, UK Border Agency officials came to the flat searching for "illegal" migrants. Luckily enough, none of the family was in the flat at that particular moment; nevertheless a few days later the family received a letter that demanded their presence at the local Immigration offices.

Feeling threatened, they went to the appointment and found out that the authorities had discovered Pedro's use of false documentation in the previous years. Pedro was warned about

⁵⁴ The immigration rules at the time allowed the dependants of someone on a student visa to work full-time.

the criminal offence he was committing, but because his family was with him in the UK, he was given some time to settle his affairs in England and go back to Bolivia by the 21st of January of 2005. Lourdes and Pedro knew there was nothing they could do about their legal situation or visa; using a false document was a criminal offence which carried a prison sentence. It was risky to try to stay in the UK, but they decided to continue with their life project and fled to London. This was their tactic to resist the deportation regime that was imposed on them by the Home Office. As Lourdes put it:

We knew we were doing something illegal as we were running away from the Home Office, but we decided that it was better to live clandestinely than to return to Bolivia with empty hands. The solution for us was to hide, therefore if you want to disappear from the Home Office, the best hiding place is London.

Thanks to the anonymity provided by London, the Home Office ceased to be a threat as the entire family effectively vanished from the system; London provided the perfect threshold to anonymity and invisibility for many years and paradoxically a space of existence where deportation - although latent - was less of a risk. The myriad of cultures in the city automatically hid their racial difference, something that could not be said of Spalding.⁵⁵

To Lourdes and Pedro, this advantage had a darker side: they saw London as a polluted place where people from all over the world contaminated and distorted the English language (even though they did not speak English) and more importantly, coloured the place with non-white people. In their minds, as was expressed by most of my informants, London was imagined as a place of white people only, where English was the only language spoken. Facing the reality of a multicultural London became a source of conflict and disappointment. Their previous ideas of race and class underscored the way in which they positioned themselves towards other people in London. In the presence of so many different ethnicities and races, Lourdes and Pedro asserted their white *mestizo* background rather than their indigenous one. Even though they appeared indigenous and looked, as they called it, more *moreno* (dark skin) than *blanquito* (white), they never claimed to have an indigenous identity or background.

Remarks about the class and race of people from different ethnic backgrounds in London were frequently made by my informants; such expressions of racism were sustained in the

⁵⁵ Spalding is a town in Lincolnshire which is predominantly white.

“whiteness” of their mestizo background, placing themselves above others (blacks, Asians, people from the Middle East, etc.). At times they even considered their legal status to be different from that of others as they claimed to come from “middle-class” backgrounds and had entered the country legally. Their ethnic markers were not identified with and targeted as being those of an “illegal” migrant, as happens to Latin American migrants in the US, therefore they could still blend in. This aspect sharply contrasts with the experiences of Latino migrants in the US studied by De Genova. He shows how deportability is constructed around legal frameworks, surveillance and race. In the UK being Latino does not hold the same political identity as it does in the US. I am not suggesting that the UK does not apply immigration policies (or other policies) filtered by race (as was the case with the Afro Caribbean migrants in the UK (see Gilroy 1987)), or targeting “illegal” migrants (mainly South Asians) with the “Illegal, go home campaign” for example. Compared to the US, Latin American migration has been seen in a different light in the UK because of its size and duration in the country and the fact that they are still not recognised as an ethnic minority.

However uncomfortable London’s diversity made them feel, they had no option but to commence the long journey of illegality in London which included learning the skills to survive amongst the thousands of other migrants searching for similar dreams. Once in London, Pedro continued working with false documentation as a cleaner for a well-known international organisation in the city while Lourdes used a fake National Insurance number to work several hours a week as a cleaner in an office and as a domestic worker in private houses.

Migrants used all resources available to guarantee an income and overcome the restrictions imposed by the law in relation to their undocumented or semi-legal status; either by working in breach of the employment restrictions attached to their visas or by acquiring fake identities or by working cash in hand in private households or in prostitution. In 2008 the state developed new and more draconian laws designed to prevent illegal migrants from working in the UK; on February 2008 a civil penalty regime was instituted under section 15 of the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006, establishing tougher penalties for employers who employed “illegal” migrants. This new regime forced employers to monitor the immigration status of their employees by threatening them with increased fines for employing illegal migrants, which range from £5,000 to £10,000. But more importantly, the civil penalty scheme sits alongside the criminal offence of knowingly employing an “illegal” migrant worker which

carries maximum custodial sentence of two years, and/or an unlimited fine.⁵⁶ This regime had a significant impact on the lives of my informants as many of them were suddenly required to provide original copies of passports and visas. This had not been the case before, and consequently, migrants were forced to leave their current jobs to protect their employers from the Home Office authorities.

As De Genova has stated, only by reflecting on and considering the socio-legal changes in a particular historical context does it become possible to locate the production of illegality and of the deportable individual (2002:430-5). It is particularly important to take into account the recent changes that the UK government has made within immigration law, changes which have been justified for the purposes of national security, protection of the national economy and employment. Current immigration policies that are further limiting the rights of particular labour migrants are calculated interventions that respond specifically to the opening of the European Union to Eastern European countries (and the acquisition of cheap low skilled, but legal labour) and more recently to the economic crisis of 2008. “The government expects to meet all of their low-skilled vacancies with workers from the enlarged EU. This expectation is reflected in the proposal for a new points-based system for managing migration in the UK, which aims to strictly limit low-skilled immigration from outside the EEA” (Ruhs and Anderson, 2008:8). As in many countries, undocumented migrants are minor and vulnerable actors who are forced to live in a sort of limbo regardless of their economic relevance for the national economy. But the extent of the illegality of any particular group may vary over time depending on broader circumstances.

Clandestine occupations

Despite the restrictions within immigration law, people perceived and enacted illegality in different ways according to their own life histories, social expectations and gender ideologies. In this regard, Cecilia and her partner Antonio (also from Bolivia) found themselves carrying out unlawful actions that went beyond their status and beyond the use of false documentation. The first time I visited Cecilia and Antonio's flat I saw a strange narrow door with a big padlock

⁵⁶ <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/business-sponsors/preventing-illegal-working/penaltiesemployers/>. Accessed May 2013.

leading to a third room in what I thought was a two-bedroom flat. When I asked Cecilia what was behind the locked door, she told me that it was Antonio's dental practice; their home was Antonio's working place in London. He had bought a second hand dental chair and had brought most of his dental hand pieces and some drugs from Bolivia because it was difficult, if not impossible, to buy the necessary drugs for his practice in London without a proper permit. The room was quite small but had enough space for a dental chair and stool for him. Antonio received patients three times a week and shared the practice with his brother, who also had been a dentist back in Bolivia. Having his dental practice at home allowed Antonio to babysit Micaela while Cecilia worked during the day as a domestic worker in private houses, places where she was not asked to present any documents to be able to work. Meanwhile they were both saving money by not paying for day care. His practice allowed him to maintain his role as the main breadwinner, who ironically became the main carer of the baby, even though he considered it a woman's job.⁵⁷ Although the gendered roles inside the household had been partially inverted, Antonio was able to maintain part of the professional status he previously held, even though he had lost what he called his "lifestyle" in Bolivia. 'I was a successful dentist until people could not pay anymore for my services. When things were fine, I had my own car and enjoyed going out with friends who were like me. I had a good life', he told me once.

I found many cases in which Latin American migrants managed, despite the odds, to maintain their previous occupations, such as dental practitioners, hairdressers and masseuses. Such occupations were easily practised in the domestic environment, hidden from the authorities and the public gaze. Antonio's clandestine dental practice, allowed him, by his own account, to be the person he really was back in Bolivia. By stepping into illegality he was nonetheless recuperating himself in a convoluted and counterintuitive way: he was committing a serious criminal offence by working without a proper permit. People like Antonio were going beyond the simple use of false documents: they were breaking the law in order to work in their customary occupations that they were not permitted to practice in the UK as a result of the lack of recognition of foreign professional qualifications. In other words, Antonio's tactics were a way to resist the wider legal and state framework, while at the same time sustaining a particular social status and lifestyle.

⁵⁷ Antonio had two children in Bolivia. He told me that he had never been involved, until now, in the care of his babies.

Antonio maintained his clandestine practice for several years, until May 2012 when they received a visit from the Metropolitan Police who wanted to see a former flat mate suspected of selling drugs. On the police's first visit, Antonio allowed them to enter and to search the flat. He said he was quite nervous at the time but because he had not committed any crime his conscience was clean. Despite being undocumented, he thought that his openness and collaborative behaviour would prove that he had nothing to be scared of and that he was hiding nothing. A few weeks after the incident with the police, on a Saturday at around eight at night, the police returned to Antonio's house. On this occasion they were looking for him and held a search warrant. The police found the clandestine dental practice and proceeded to detain Antonio for practising without a license.

In the course of the criminal case that unfolded from this incident, Antonio and Cecilia's legal status was revealed. As the criminal investigation and gathering of evidence proceeded, Antonio and Cecilia were required to report to London Bridge's Immigration Offices once a week. This is a common method used by the UKBA to keep tabs on undocumented migrants. It is a regular surveillance practice used whenever officials from the Home Office find such migrants but, as in the case of Antonio, do not deport them right away due to a pending criminal case. By forcing migrants to report once a week, the immigration authorities maintain surveillance and control over "illegal" migrants. The control is twofold, physical and psychological, as they execute their power and control by retaining the information and knowledge regarding migrants' cases and deportation orders. The weekly encounters with UKBA authorities, which exposed them as intermittend deportable subjects, placed Cecilia and Antonio in a space of nonexistence. Every time they went to sign they were uncertain whether the moment for their deportation had arrived. However, because they were a family they knew they had better chances not to be deported, as the UK is not a state that simply throws people in prison or deports them. On the contrary, as Gibney states, "inclusive practices towards immigrants and asylum seekers" are evident once those migrants have "arrived in liberal democratic states" (2002:19-46). They are less liberal when it comes to preventing from accessing the territory. He further explains that "the practical and moral controversy that surrounds deportation has often led to liberal states doing little to remove illegal residents, and concentrating their energies instead on preventing initial arrivals" (2008:147). Migrants then are messed around, not by an autocratic state but by a liberal state to which they aspire to belong.

Still, in spite of the fact that Cecilia and Antonio were under surveillance and Antonio was facing a criminal trial, they refused to think of themselves as criminals who had carried out an unlawful action. As Cecilia remarked:

Antonio is not a criminal, he is a good partner and a good father, he is just trying to provide for our family and for his two daughters back in Bolivia. He knows he should not work as a dentist in London. That is why he keeps doing it clandestinely and at home. But he is a dentist. He studied odontology. It is not fair for him to clean offices or houses. What he is doing is not a crime, he just does not have the proper documents to do it legally in London.

Cecilia's and Antonio's actions were executed and justified according to what they judged to be fair regardless of their legal status. When I asked him about his situation, he told me he could not see himself as a criminal because he was indeed a dentist, he was not deceiving anyone or putting someone's life in danger. He was forced to do it illegally because of a lack of documents, a lack of knowledge of the English language, and difficulties practising their occupations, among other things. As Cecilia put it, their illegal status frustrated them and strongly influenced the choices that they made in spite of the wider criminal implications.

Despite the different experiences of illegality, the personal stories presented here demonstrate how, as soon as migrants became undocumented they potentially become trapped in a web of illicit actions that blur the boundaries between legality and illegality. Migrants' everyday life choices surpassed the legal offence of being undocumented or semi-legal since they were working clandestinely and breaching the terms of their visas, actions that are severely punishable by law but that paradoxically offered possibilities for them. In such stories, the lack of legal status became the pivotal reason to engage in illegality, to "choose" to act against the law.

Among my informants who worked as sex workers, illegal status was a matter of concern within the already constraining and liminal situation of their jobs. As I will explain further in Chapter Five, women made strategic decisions regarding work in order to be able to lead a normal life and separate their real persons from their working personas but also to avoid problems with the UKBA authorities. For example, some women chose to work sporadically at swing parties⁵⁸ and sometimes in brothels in order to overcome the limitations of their legal status.

⁵⁸ Swing parties are parties organised by a madam or a pimp in which women (sex workers) are hired to entertain men who pay an entrance fee to have sex with several women for the duration of the party.

In Britain it is against the law to loiter or solicit on the street, to solicit clients by advertisement, to run a house of ill-repute (brothel) and to financially or materially benefit from immoral earnings (this includes living and financially supporting family or partners). It is legal in the UK to pay for sex therefore women do not infringe the law if they work in the privacy of their flats. A woman is allowed to offer sex services in the private space of her home.⁵⁹ However, the same sex transaction becomes illegal and criminalised the moment more than one woman works in the same place, as it is automatically considered a brothel under the law.⁶⁰

Therefore, when Sabrina and Amanda decided to work in their own flat, Sabrina, as an undocumented migrant, knew that she was not only committing a criminal offence but could also face immediate deportation if caught.⁶¹ Yet, even though it meant participating in illicit practices, it was an option that some women decided to take in order to reduce expenses and increase their personal security. Amanda and Sabrina shared a flat in one of the financial districts of London for five months until they were caught by the police and were accused of, but not prosecuted for, working in a brothel. It all started when Amanda received a "client" who was a police officer in disguise. When she opened the door five women police officers and one male officer came into the flat looking for evidence of a brothel, trafficking victims and drugs. As Amanda had signed the tenancy agreement she was liable to be accused of pimping Sabrina and administering the brothel. She told me later that it was very hard for her to prove that she was not a madam and to argue, deceitfully, that she was unaware that working with a friend in the same flat was indeed a crime. Sabrina, on the other hand, was required to show her documentation, and because of her status in the country, she was susceptible to be deported back to Brazil. During the encounter with the police, Sabrina had to provide evidence of the fact that she was going back to Brazil in December for good. Luckily, she was dealing with a sympathetic police officer who decided not to call the Home Office in order to deport her. In the end the officers only gave them a warning about the illegality of working together in a flat and said they should move to different localities,

⁵⁹ Indeed, private flats represent working environments similar to domestic settings, where a sexual act takes place resembling the dynamics of social relationships between partners

⁶⁰ It is an offence for a person to keep, or to manage, or act or assist in the management of, a brothel to which people resort for practices involving prostitution. This offence is created by section 33A of the Sexual Offences Act 1956, which was inserted by the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The premises that are frequented by men for intercourse with only one woman are not considered a brothel, and this is also related to whether she is a tenant or not. Section 33A: Keeping a brothel used for prostitution. (1) It is an offence for a person to keep, or to manage, or act or assist in the management of, a brothel to which people resort for practices involving prostitution (whether or not also for other practices).

⁶¹ By the time they were working at this flat Amanda had married a Portuguese friend as a gateway to legality.

a demand that was further checked by the police in the coming weeks. From this moment, Sabrina and Amanda were under surveillance. They, like many other women working in the area, were tolerated as long as they kept their work private and unseen from the public so as not to disturb the moral order.

After moving to separate flats, Sabrina and Amanda started working independently in their respective homes. For Amanda, working alone was not really an option, as she was constantly worried about security. Soon after she moved into a new flat, Amanda asked a friend to move in and work with her. In contrast to Sabrina, Yvonne was discreet enough to hide their work from neighbours (who were usually the main problem in exposing them and demanding their eviction from the premises), other working flats and the police. Meanwhile Sabrina, with the support of a regular client, was able to rent a flat in the same area. Although this time she worked alone therefore legally under the law, but still did not have legal status. After working as a sex worker in London for over two years and having learned how to cope with the moral conundrums that the occupation entailed, she knew she was gambling every time she opened the door to a new client who could be a police officer in disguise. Although at the beginning Sabrina's main concerns were due to her undocumented status, as this was now the only obstacle to her achieving her financial goal before going back to Brazil in December 2011, her concerns shifted after she was the victim of a violent attack at her flat (Chapter Five).

The stories that I have presented are those of people who engaged in illicit "criminal" practices but nonetheless managed to overcome their illegality on a day-to-day basis by sustaining a "normal" life. Whenever they faced the UKBA authorities - or any other state authority - migrants were reminded of their deportability and entered into spaces of nonexistence that threatened their future hopes and aspirations. Following this, the next section explores the immediate and personal consequences of illegality in the everyday lives of migrants; it analyses how some women and their families embodied illegality and how such embodiment affected them not only in the public space, but also within the private space of home.

Living everyday illegality

Elephant and Castle is one of several Latin American enclaves: a place where migrants buy Latin

American food and clothes, get a *Latino* haircut or manicure. It was known as the place where many people spoke Spanish or Portuguese, where visitors were not forced to struggle with the English language, and where they could therefore feel at "home".⁶² However, because of the strong presence of migrants in such spaces, it was also one of the places that the Border Agency (UKBA) kept under surveillance and targeted for random immigration checks and deportations.⁶³

During my fieldwork I had the opportunity to witness the presence of authorities moving back and forth between the different bus stops in front of the shopping centre of Elephant and Castle. Bus stops became a bustle of people from all over the world finding their routes, traveling back and forth in London throughout the day. It was easy to identify the authorities, as their uniforms made them stand out from the crowd. On some occasions officers did no more than walk around the bus stops, scaring people around them by their mere presence. It was relatively easy to distinguish those who were afraid of having an encounter with UKBA authorities or the police, as they would immediately change their route or hide. My informants had similar reactions; the moment they detected the presence of any authority our route immediately changed. Instead of walking down the pavement next to the bus stops we would leave the street and venture into the Shopping Centre for a "short cut". There was always a way to hide from the police and inform other migrants about the presence of the police by sending text messages to friends and acquaintances. Whenever a person was detained, the network of information and gossip distributed the news among my friends, creating warnings for other people. The fact that the state increased the number of police raids executed in places such as Elephant and Castle served the purpose of exacerbating migrants' sense of deportability. As a result, some migrant organisations distributed free information regarding migrants' rights with instructions on what to do in the event of detention. Flyers like the one below were widely distributed in Latin American places in order to inform people about the rights of undocumented migrants and ways to fight back against the new Immigration policies.

⁶² South London (especially Lambeth and Southwark) contains the highest number of Latin American people in London (McIlwaine, et. al 2010).

⁶³ For instance, in February 25th 2012, ninety people were detained and deported after not being able to show a valid ID to Border Agency Officials and the Metropolitan Police while queuing at a theatre called *The Coronet* in Elephant and Castle where a *reggaeton* concert was taking place. www.theprisma.co.uk/2012/03/12/immigration-raid-a=concert-with-a-very-bad-taste/



Figure 2. Nadie es ilegal. Nobody is illegal, pocket guide

Latin Americans believed that the police and UKBA authorities were specifically organised to hunt them down and deport them. The perception of a public space such as Elephant was mediated by the gossip about other peoples' detentions and by personal experiences that affected the psychological well-being of my informants. As Willen has noted, "Migrants' interactions with state institutions and individual agents of state power are frequent catalysts of the specific kinds of fear, anxiety, frustration and suffering such migrants do, often habitually, endure" (Willen 2007:13). Even when as on some occasions, it was officers of the Metropolitan Police patrolling the streets rather than those of the Border Agency, they were nonetheless perceived as a threat. In everyday life the presence of authorities was a constant reminder of their undocumented status. Such policing of public spaces had the effect of disciplining migrants by "surveilling their illegality and exacerbating their sense of ever-present vulnerability" (De Genova 2004:178). However, the vulnerability of undocumented migrants was also exacerbated in the private space of the home. In what follows, I explore how, as a result of this surveillance, migrants' homes could become temporary spaces of nonexistence and could potentially become sources of fear.

Narratives of anxiety

The space of home, which was generally considered as a safe place, was in many cases contested because of the complex social relations with strangers that emerged within it; relations that were on some occasions amiable and helpful but on others a source of gossip and mistrust. Take Angelica who (besides having been deported in the past from Portugal), experienced anxieties at home in London after the police came to the flat in search for “illegal” migrants. For some years Angelica lived in Bayswater, which is famous for its Brazilian migrant population. She used to share a flat with other Brazilian migrants who she suspected were mostly undocumented or semi-legal. On one occasion the police raided the flat in the middle of the day looking for “illegal” migrants. When they banged on the door, Angelica was in her room. She heard one of her flatmates opening the door while the police started asking questions about documents. The man who opened the door had a real Portuguese passport therefore had no further problems. However, they asked about the rest of the people living in the flat. As it was in the middle of the day, most of the people were out at work except for her, the Portuguese man and another Brazilian man who worked as a cleaner at night and therefore was at home sleeping. Angelica worked as a sex worker therefore she was at home taking a nap before going to work. When the police knocked on the door she was forced to wake up and open the door of her room for the them, who immediately asked for her passport. Angelica made up a story about how she was in the middle of her visa application, consequently her passport was held by the Home Office. She managed to show some papers from her local clinic in London, as she had an NHS number, and told them that she had lost the letter from the Home Office. After questioning her for more than half an hour, the police decided not to arrest her and left the flat with the Brazilian flatmate who did not have documents. Angelica was convinced that a woman who lived there was the one who called the Home Office because, according to her, she did not like her and wanted to get rid of her. Several of my informants commented and shared the same concerns about the people they lived with: it was imperative to hide one’s own legal status because strangers could not be trusted. Many experienced the constant threat of betrayal and fear of being denounced by other migrants to the police.

After such an event, Angelica was not able to sleep for weeks; she was often reluctant to

leave her room and started experiencing constant nightmares. Her dreams revolved around the moment at which the police banged on the door and came into the house. She explained that she could hear the police shouting and feel the vibration of their steps moving inside the house. In her dream the police did not knock on her door but she could see the feet of the officer through the tiny gap between the door and the floor. 'The officer was there, without moving, just waiting for me to make a noise and enter my room', she told me. Her anxiety increased and for a couple of months she was convinced that the police were always waiting for her outside her flat; her "home" was no longer safe. The encounter with the police resulted in an increase of distrust and social isolation, it enhanced her suspicions of practically everyone she knew, mainly the people with whom she shared the flat. It took a while for Angelica to feel "normal" again in London which she did once she moved out of the flat to live in a new place with different people. It was a new beginning; she would start living again among strangers who did not know anything about her life or her legal status, it was a temporary space of existence in which, according to her, it was just a matter of time before these new companions found out her undocumented status.

In similar vein, once in London, Lourdes experienced severe anxieties at home after Pedro had been detained and deported by the police in 2007. This is Pedro's account of the event.

At 9 am I was riding my bicycle and crashed into another bicycle. The accident took place in front of a place where police officers were. The accident caught the attention of several people, including police officers who came to see what had happened. The police asked for ID and as I did not have any documents with my photo, they started asking me more and more questions. I guess I started getting nervous and they arrested me under the suspicion of being illegal in this country. They took me to the police station in Holborn, the next week I was on a plane back to Bolivia. My family remained in London because I refused to give them information about their whereabouts.

Ironically, Pedro was caught as a consequence of having decided to substitute the much-feared buses with another type of transportation: the bicycle. He explained that he did not want to use buses anymore because of the expense and due to the number of raids that were taking place at bus stops, especially those close to his home in South London. When Pedro was caught by the police he was able to contact Lourdes and warn her about the possibility that Immigration might come to the flat and detain the whole family. Even though he had not given any information regarding his family, he knew that it would not be hard for the police to track his home address through his work. It was just a matter of time before they found Lourdes and the children. As a

result Lourdes and her two sons temporarily moved to a friend's house until Pedro was removed from the UK. During the two weeks that it took to carry out his deportation, Lourdes did not see or talk to Pedro. Although he wanted to call Lourdes and explain the problem, in the interests of protecting them and hiding their whereabouts he refused to do so.

Coming on top of Pedro's deportation, this isolation and lack of contact stirred a wave of concerns that, Lourdes told me, affected her mental and physical well-being. Her angst grew considerably not only when she was on the street, but remarkably when she was at home. The place that had been considered a safe haven, a space of existence where the daily life of the family unfolded for the last few years suddenly became the most threatening place in the city (*c.f.* Willen 2007, Talavera et. al. 2010). Although home was a place where the boundaries between existence and nonexistence could potentially blur, for Lourdes it had now definitively become the latter. Even when the door was locked and the flatmates were all together, Lourdes was unable to feel safe. As she subsequently told me, returning home after work or after picking up the kids from the bus stop on their way back from school became the most terrifying experience. She was obsessed with the idea that the police would be waiting for her inside the flat. After the incident she suffered from insomnia for months because she wanted to remain alert all night, glancing through the window with the lights off, to see if the police were coming. Any noise sounded as though the police were trying to enter into the flat, whoever walked down the street or knocked on her door sounded like the police. In the middle of the night and even when she managed to gain some sleep she would often wake up because of nightmares.⁶⁴

I keep dreaming about the police coming to the flat, for our passports, turning all our clothes upside down, looking under the bed to see if there is anyone hiding. And we are there, me with my two kids, under the bed hiding, when suddenly the police find us and grab my children from under the bed away from me. This is where I wake up, sweating and nervous, almost feeling that I am about to cry. I remain like this for a few moments until I realise that my children are here next to me, they are sleeping peacefully, I am fine as well, it has just been a bad dream.

Lourdes had frequent nightmares of detention and fears of arrest until Pedro came back to London using another passport - with a different name - in February 2008. Lourdes's main concern was not knowing whether Pedro would succeed in deceiving the UK Border Agency once more and rejoin the family.

⁶⁴ See Willen (2007) for similar analysis.

The only resource that helped Lourdes to mitigate the night time fear was prayer and attending the other place she considered a haven of safety: church. Although only close friends from church knew the real story of Pedro's absence –due to the lack of trust towards strangers - Lourdes found comfort among them. But above all it was praying that brought her comfort, 'I could not do anything else but ask God to help us, I know he listened: all I wanted was to provide Pedro with a safe journey back to London, to us', she said to me.

The same place that unraveled temporary fears and made migrants face their intermittent experience of deportability, sometimes became the comfort they needed to exist. Homes were also spaces of existence where people were unaware of their illegality.

I get home every day after being working all day and I thank God because he has given me another day. Every day is like this, I am always expecting to be caught by the Home Office and be deported back to Honduras.

As I described in the introduction of this chapter Sarita, who spoke the words quoted above, experienced public spaces as threatening: they were where she was likely to bump into the state authorities and get deported. Public space for Sarita was a space of invisibility in which she could not stop thinking (as she said) about the threat of deportation. In London, Sarita felt like a "ghost", she also desired to be a ghost and every time she left her house she wanted to become invisible in order to be protected from deportation. However, there were spaces of existence where she felt she could be like herself again, like the tiny studio flat that she shared with Jesus, her husband, and their fifteen-year-old daughter Aylin. Home provided the space of existence that Sarita required every day, in her alternative undocumented existence, to survive. As Coutin has stated, "the discrepancies between inclusive social connections and confining legal statuses "fracture" persons, requiring them to exist in multiple yet incompatible worlds" (2011:4). It was only in the space of home where the discourse of the state, surveillance and the fragility that she experienced in public temporarily vanished. Once Sarita arrived there she felt safe. She would take her shoes off, put on a pair of slippers and venture into the tiny kitchen to cook something for the family. While cooking she told me stories of the time she worked as a cook in Honduras at a Mexican restaurant and how much she wished to establish a restaurant like that one in London once they got their documents. Although the flat was tiny, Sarita appreciated the fact that they were living as a family by themselves rather than sharing a flat with strangers. Here, at home, she felt they were protected from the outside world, she did not have to lie or to remain invisible.

Home was a safe place where Sarita, as she told me, felt like herself again especially through embodying the role of the caring wife and mother.

The experiences described above expose the fundamental link that exists between the confrontation with authorities and the embodiment of illegality. Law, which at times was perceived as abstract and separated from oneself, materialised itself through the encounters with the police, or the expectation of encountering them. Legal vulnerability and the terror of being caught by the police, each reinforcing the other, emphasised women migrants' personhood as deportable, creating further uncertainties. In spite of these uncertainties, keeping the family together and providing a better future were recurrent reasons why people remained in the country illegally and committed further unlawful acts that ironically exacerbated their deportability. What kept them going was their knowledge that, if they were able to withstand the burden of being undocumented, they might, at some point in the future, gain the opportunity to become legal and thereby take a large step towards realising their ambitions.

The long way to legality: the changing legal landscape

As I touched on earlier, the current restrictions for labour migrants have made it almost impossible for them to retain their legal status and/or achieve a different one. The current changes to students' visas have affected both prospective and on-going students who were previously allowed to work part-time and whose partners were permitted to work full-time under the conditions of their visas. "English" student visas are more restricted now than they were before. In order to extend their visas, migrants are now required to complete an English test at a higher level as well as to prove that they are actually studying. This was not always the case, as many were able to maintain the fiction of being "students" whilst in reality working full time and barely, if at all, attending classes as previously noted. Many of the people I met paid student fees to private colleges for several years in order to simply maintain their legal status, but this has now become much more difficult as the government has clamped down on bogus colleges and it is generally only possible to study at the more prestigious higher education institutions.

Take Jovanna, who in 2001 worked for four months with the NIN of another Bolivian woman. This woman constantly made excuses in order to avoid paying Jovanna the salary she had earned for over two months. After realising that she could not do anything about the money Jovanna decided to enroll in an English course in order to be able to work as a student for twenty hours a week. In 2001 it had been possible for tourists to change the status of their visa while in the UK, a practice that many of the people who had remained in the UK for lengthy periods used in order to be able to work “legally”.

Until 2011 their visas had allowed them to work up to 20 hours a week. As a result, many of my informants used their visa to work more than 20 hours and just paid college tuition fees to maintain their “student” record. Women like Jovanna worked for forty hours a week in different cleaning companies for more than seven years. She managed to do this by paying the fees of the English school, which amounted to £2000-£3000 a year, in order to be able to renew her student visa. Maintaining a student status was a common practice among my informants; formally speaking they were not illegal, but the moment they chose to breach their visa, when the legal reality was superimposed on their everyday lives, they entered into the realm of illegality. Jovanna was required to hide the fact that she was working more hours than those permitted under her visa. She had to hide and keep herself under the radar.

The current impositions on low-skilled migrants define different types of persons, drawing a stark division between the “desirable” and the “deportable”. At the same time they are pushing people to become - and stay - semi-legal or undocumented for longer periods of time and commit further illicit actions to survive. The breaching of the terms of the visa and working with false documents were tactics used by migrants in order to make ends meet in London and send remittances back home. Ironically these tactics could eventually be used to negotiate their residence visas.

Keeping the student visa allowed migrants like Jovanna to accumulate years in order to eventually apply for a residence visa (*c.f.* James and Killick 2012). Under current UK Immigration Law, those who enter the UK and remain here legally for 10 years continuously - either as students or with some other category of visa - are permitted to acquire permanent residence or Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) in legal parlance. There are other ways of acquiring ILR or other types of legal residence which enable migrants to gain a more secure footing here. However the 10 year route was a commonly used route amongst my informants and their acquaintances.

Those with ILR have unlimited access to state benefits and, after holding the ILR visa for one year, become eligible to apply for British citizenship (provided they have lived here for at least 5 years prior to this). For those who became undocumented either by overstaying their temporary visas or by entering the country clandestinely (often through Ireland)⁶⁵ - becoming legal again was a difficult process which meant successfully navigating ever tightening and constantly shifting immigration rules. One route to legality - at least until 9 July 2012 - was to remain here undetected for 14 years and then be able to prove it. By doing this, people could apply for permanent residence. However on 9 July 2012 the state made some amendments to the law lengthening the relevant period from 14 to 20 years.

Among my informants one of the most common ways of legalising their status was to make an application based on article 8 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights; this article establishes that “Everyone has the right to respect his private and family life, his home and correspondence”. The second part of the article establishes that the state shall not interfere in an individual’s enjoyment of his family or private life except “as...is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others”. In the context of immigration law and much to the chagrin of the signatory states, Article 8 has been interpreted liberally by the courts as conferring rights on migrants who accumulate time and ties to the host country even when they have been here without permission; the stronger the established ties or “family life” or “private life”, the stronger a migrant’s claim to legalizing his or her status. “‘Proper family life’ lies at the heart of UK immigration law. Its enforcers and implementers in the Home Office lay equal stress on this ideal” (James and Killick 2012:444). Children’s ties to the host country have been given enhanced protections and therefore many of my informants with children made applications based on their children’s residence here; as a rule of thumb seven years residence in the case of a child was often sufficient to provide the basis for a successful application for the child and, by extension, his family.

The success of these applications often seemed to depend on how much evidence the case workers are able to gather in order to prove that migrants have an established life in the UK.

⁶⁵ Many migrants came to the UK via Ireland because it was easier for them to obtain a visa to enter Ireland. They would then travel to the UK by ferry which is part of the UK and Ireland common travel area, therefore is not subject to strict border controls.

Although I do not have space to talk about the relationships of my informants with their case workers/lawyers, it is interesting to note that both parties worked in collaboration to emphasise particular values in the life histories of my informants as a way to secure their permanence in the UK. Individuals attempted to show that they were well integrated, that they had strong family ties, that they participated actively in the community (e.g., they belonged to a church, did volunteer work), that they had English friends and ties in London, that they were trying to “progress” and, in the strongest cases, that they spoke English (see Coutin 2011, James and Killick 2012 for the UK). In other words, by demonstrating that they had acculturated, such applicants argued that deportation or removal from the UK would be a traumatic experience for them and, more specifically, for their children. Although this type of application was not always successful, as the Home Office constantly argues that children could easily go back to their countries of origin and re-adapt to the new place, there were several successful cases that I knew about while doing participant observation with an Immigration Lawyer and his clients during my fieldwork. The outcome of this type of application results in a Discretionary Leave to Remain (DLR) visa that is granted for a period of three to five years. After this period of time people are required to renew their DLR for an extra three to five years and eventually apply for an ILR, which is granted for 10 years. However, when people hold an ILR for one year, they are automatically entitled, finally, to apply for citizenship which involves other set of conditions, including passing a ‘Life in the UK’ test and being able to speak English, aspects that were not required in the past.

The long and winding road to citizenship has been designed to create residents with fewer rights than those held by citizens. Furthermore it forces undesirable/low skilled migrants to remain undocumented for long periods of time, to remain invisible and waiting for years to obtain legal documents. This draconian system of temporary visas and permits constructs a particular person that is positioned in a state of limbo and extended waiting, although people holding an ILR can live here permanently. It has, however, become increasingly difficult for people to get an ILR as the rules are constantly changing. Migrants have to prove over a long period of time that they are worthy of becoming permanent residents and eventually citizens. The waiting and the eventual acquisition of legal status for some women will be discussed in the Epilogue. I will further explain how, for some, the acquisition of legal status eased the sense of deportability but did not offer the dream they were hoping for, in terms of occupational status and class identity. As James and Killick suggest, “... even regularizing of legal status might have

negative consequences, by threatening the delicately maintained status quo of a heretofore illegal existence” (2012:445).

Conclusion

The stories that I have presented in this chapter represent the stories of people who underwent changes at different levels, because of migration. For my informants, migration implied a rupture in their lives that was followed by the dislocation entailed in becoming undocumented.

I have explored women’s narratives about how they prepared for their trips before coming to London. These indicate that the initial production of the undocumented person occurred well before actually becoming one. Once in London women embodied their new legal status in ways that were mediated by high levels of anxiety and fuelled by a sense of deportability. It is in contrast to this experience of deportability - where women remain vulnerable both in public and even in private - that the acquisition of different skills, as part of their new persons, needs to be understood. Women were required to develop skills and moral dispositions that implicated the bending (or breaking) of the law in order to survive in London. Within the spaces of illegality, women reiterated their presence and new forms of existence through different resources, even if it was difficult to escape from illegality in the longer term.

Being a different person, or thinking of themselves as different persons, was determined by the way in which migrants experienced illegality. I have suggested that my informants experienced illegality through a sense of intermittent deportability (De Genova 2004). According to my informants’ accounts, the embodiment of illegality brought into being a different person who was able to adopt new modes of behaviour and transactions to endure the new socio legal status. I have shown how these transactions forced migrants to move within spaces of existence and nonexistence (eg. whenever they were forced to face the multiple aspects of their illegality) and how these spaces were not necessarily permanent but temporary. Following this, this chapter explored the ways and the tactics that migrants used in order to enter and exit spaces of existence and nonexistence. They did so partly under constraint, when encountering the punitiveness of the state and its agents. They also did so through imagining themselves as different persons who were newly engaged in enacting illegal and unlawful practices. Taking into

consideration the above, we can understand how illegality and its temporality represented an overwhelming experience, amounting, in some cases, to a state of invisibility. Hopes and expectations for the future were limited and constrained by this new life, by this way of being-in-the-world as a deportable person. However, regardless of the effects of the experiences of illegality, people created tactics to temporarily overcome the anxieties and made efforts to normalise their lives and their persons and create opportunities for themselves (as I will also show in Chapter Seven). Further changes in the lives of women are the subject of the two subsequent chapters. The following chapter explores the alienation that women experienced at work as intimate labourers. Both chapters show how intimate labour cannot be understood in the same way as other types of labour as it conveys the complex purchase of intimacy. Such commodification produced personal forms of dislocation that women were required to manage. The next chapter, then, focuses on the everyday challenges, dislocations and negotiations that women who worked as domestic workers confronted and engaged with.

Chapter Four

Domestic work: intimacy and its commodification

As I explained in Chapter Two, women's reasons for migrating are as diverse as the stories that compose this thesis and it is therefore hard to pin them down under one encompassing explanation. Their reasons are complex and multifaceted and they are intertwined with economic, social and personal motives. Nevertheless, regardless of the different motivations and personal stories, what many of those women who migrate from developing to developed countries have in common is that they enter into the market of intimate labour. The insertion into this form of labour is strengthened by the fact that many of these women, as I have explained in the previous chapter, were undocumented. For women with no documents, the different forms of work within intimate labour allowed them to earn a steady income to live in the new country, pay their debts and/or send remittances to their families.

This chapter will focus, in particular, on those who arrived in London and worked in domestic work, an occupation that has been overwhelmingly taken up by migrant women (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002:6). This international transfer of women's traditional services, from poor to rich countries, has functioned as a solution for what Ehrenreich and Hochschild have called the care deficit. "The care deficit that has emerged in the wealthier countries as women enter the workforce pulls migrants from the third world and postcommunist nations: poverty pushes them" (2002:8). In broad outline, as the authors suggest, this holds true. Yet it would be unfair and misleading to say that women's choices (for example, the desire for independence, more leisure or autonomy outside the household) in rich countries are the only reason for the expansion of the domestic work female global market. This explanation does not take into account the fact that the increase in the number of women who have taken on paid jobs has not been supported by adequate state policies. In other words, the state has not been able to catch up with working women and to provide an adequate structure, for example, in the provision of child care and care for the elderly in order to help dual working households. This, as Lutz (2008) argues, only shows the prevalence of particular traditional gender ideologies within

the state that are subtly promoted through the lack of support for working families.

Furthermore, this explanation also ignores the fact that the so called “care gap” is not due to women’s labour empowerment or personal choices, but to the persistent inequalities that persist within the household regarding reproductive labour. As my research will show, the lack of involvement of men in basic household chores, from cleaning to caring for children, forces women to hire other women to help them with the burden of the second shift. For instance, in a recent study from 2012, the Institute for Public Policy Research in the UK showed that just over one in ten women (13%) say their husbands do more housework than they do, while only 3% of married women do fewer than three hours a week of housework, with almost half doing 13 hours or more. The patterns of inequality within the household, despite “domestic struggles”(Bozzoli 1983), are still at play in many households in the west. The lack of involvement of men (in this case in Europe) in activities concerning care work is largely down to the fact that these tasks are still considered a woman’s job. As Arlie Hochschild and Barbara Ehrenreich state: “So, strictly speaking, the presence of immigrant nannies does not enable affluent women to enter into the workforce; it enables affluent men to continue avoiding the second shift” (2002:9). At the same time, migrant women who come to fill the “care gap” in developed countries often leave a “care gap” behind and are forced to rely on other women to do the reproductive labour they can no longer perform due to their migrating. Thus, the global chain of the commodification of intimacy and care becomes infinite. Andall uses the term “post feminist paradigm” to describe this situation, in which women “reconcile family and work by outsourcing (parts of) their care work to migrant women. The presence of migrants willing to do this work does in fact help them to balance work and life” (Andall cited in Lutz 2011:6) and thus deal with persistent inequalities between women and men; inequalities that are underplayed by the production of further inequalities, but this time between women.

To speak of this as an unfair contract is to refer not only to the problems that originate of this unequal female contract, but also to the prevalent perception that domestic work does not require the same labour rights as any other work. These notions prevail and are reflected in the legislation on domestic work in the UK which affords only very limited labour rights and protections to domestic workers. For example, domestic workers are excluded from national minimum wage regulations in circumstances where their employer can show that they are treated as part of the family. They are also excluded from protection under the Working Time

Regulations of 1999, in particular the maximum lawful weekly limit of 48 hours does not apply to domestic workers. They are also not accorded the same entitlements to rest periods as other workers and can be made to work night shifts. This legislation demonstrates the conservative stance and view that English law takes towards domestic work. In addition to this labour legislation, under the immigration rules there exists a domestic work visa for migrant women coming to work in private or diplomatic households. Previously the visa could be renewed for up to five years and the domestic worker could switch employers. However from April 2012, the visa is limited to six months and no change of employer is allowed. The legislation surrounding such permits does not protect the employees but the employers, leaving migrant women with less space to negotiate as their visas are attached to the employer who sponsored the visa (since April 2012), hence giving space for women to become easy targets of exploitation and abuse. Yet, the majority of domestic workers work without a contract or a visa and it therefore becomes harder for them to be recipients of labour rights, which they are entitled to in theory. Paradoxically, this informality allows undocumented migrant women to have easy access to such jobs and earn an income that they would not be able to earn otherwise.

More importantly and closely related to my own research is the perception of any form of work inside the household as intrinsically female. This in turn impacts the way in which domestic work is not seen as “real work” by either employers or by the women doing the work and thereby sustaining traditional Western notions of the roles of women and men within the household. As Rollins (1985) has argued, the implications of domestic work for gender relations is highly significant as it reproduces inequalities that sustain this work as women’s work. As I will further show in this chapter, this ideology has been used as a way to keep women in their place, doing the work they “innately” ought to do.

Indeed, a close look at any form of intimate labour, in particular domestic work, brings to light the fact that it is different from any other job. Besides its social construction as female, there is also the issue of the complex relationships between employers and employees which can be highly emotional. Domestic work entails different forms of care work: “care as labour and care as an emotion” (Anderson 2000:114). As Pierrete Hondagneu-Sotelo explains, its nature is “inherently relational, whether it consists in routine bodily care, such as bathing or feeding, or in emotional attachment, affiliation, and intimate knowledge” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2002:68); an intimate knowledge that takes place inside the private space of the home. Understanding the

household as the space that “carries out connotations of intimacy and sharing, which necessarily separate our internal household relations from other types of social relations” (Olivia Harris in Moore 1998:55), places domestic work in the middle of a conundrum of family intimacy and the performance of highly gendered roles.

My analysis takes into account queries and concerns that have developed from the literature on domestic work, whilst at the same time moves away from its analytical focus as I am concerned with women’s understandings and experiences of commodified intimacy. While the ethnographic accounts of the lives of my informants as domestic workers in the first three sections of the chapter certainly resonate with the wider literature regarding working conditions and the politics of domestic work, the final section of this chapter aims to explain the personal ways in which women dealt with an occupation that they sometimes found hard to see as a “real job” and therefore experience a series of moral conundrums framed by their caring activities. As I explained in the Introduction my analytical focus on morality and ethics emerged, on the one hand, from my informants’ narratives regarding morality and, on the other, from the need to locate and analyse how women understood and experienced the complexities that emerge from the commodification of intimacy (Constable 2009). The aim of this chapter is to focus on the different types of intimacy and their entanglement with personal moralities, without ignoring the political-economic and conflictive social dynamics of this form of labour.

Housecleaners and free-lance domestic workers: the experience of freedom versus alienation

Domestic work exists in many different forms. Although there are patterns to the job, the occupation is manifold and multifaceted, and my informants responded to the demand for many and varied types of domestic work of which the labour market in London consists. In the following section I focus on the stories of women who worked as housecleaners: those who clean the houses of different employers, are paid on an hourly basis and are not required to care for family members.

Take Juliana from Brazil, who believed that if you managed to establish a solid relationship with one of your employers it would guarantee better access to more sources of work, as people

tended to recommend women to their friends. During my fieldwork, she managed to work in five different houses across London, thanks to employers' personal recommendations. She also got work in two more houses through word of mouth from other domestic workers who knew about work opportunities. Word of mouth recommendations were based on trust and sympathy between the employer and the employee. Trusting the recommendation of a friend or acquaintance, or of a previous domestic worker, was enough for the employer to share their private space and their keys with a new stranger. The fact that employers who hired a housecleaner did not ask for documentation or visas, gave women the chance to make a living in London. For someone like Juliana, this meant being able to send remittances back to Brazil for the construction of her house in Minas (as explained in Chapter Two). She managed to earn between £150 and £250 a week working approximately eight hours a day, including some Saturdays. Ironically, although the occupation represented downward status mobility, as a housecleaner Juliana made more money than she did as a telephonist back in Brazil, and her job permitted her to send up to £200 or sometimes £300 in monthly remittances: the amount however varied depending on how many hours she worked

Juliana's day started at seven in the morning when she woke up in order to get from her flat in Southwest London to Victoria where she cleaned the house of a British family for three hours. By noon she had to be at Clapham (South London) to clean the house of another British/Portuguese family for another two hours. After Clapham, depending on the day of the week, she either had to go to Stoke Newington (Northeast London) to clean the house of a woman from Puerto Rico for two hours and then move to a house in Kilburn (Northwest London) that belonged to an elderly Portuguese lady for the last two hours of her working day. Every other day included the cleaning of a flat in Russell Square (Central London) for two hours for a couple from Argentina, followed by five different houses scattered in Brixton and Clapham (both in Southwest London). Juliana spent her days cleaning houses and commuting, ate on buses and did not return home to her shared room until eight or nine at night. Every fortnight on Saturday she cleaned the house of an English couple. Sunday was her day off, a day she usually dedicated to going to the Catholic Church in Brixton (which gave services in Portuguese) and spending time with one of her sisters and her son who were in London.

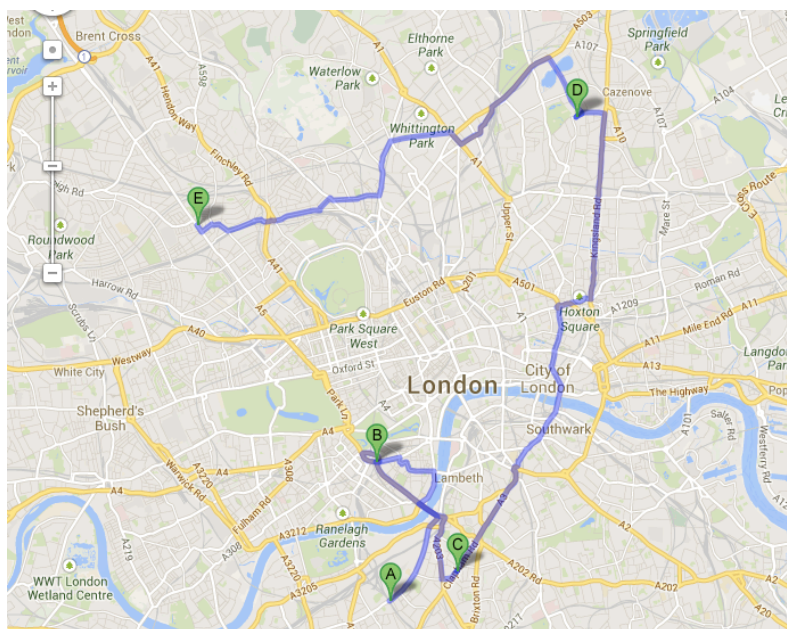


Figure 3. Map of Juliana's route (Map data ©2013 Google, Sanborn)

On some occasions I was able to accompany Juliana throughout her working day and helped her with her cleaning duties in some of the different households where she worked. Juliana was trusted with the keys of her employers' houses and had the liberty to manage her own schedule through the day as she pleased. In this respect she resembled other housecleaners who, as Romero argues, "work shorter hours and receive higher pay than other domestic workers, enjoying far greater job flexibility and autonomy; and because they have multiple jobs, they retain more negotiating power with employers" (Romero cited in Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001:28). Although this holds true, for Juliana being a housecleaner had its perks as well as its disadvantages; the freedom of administering her own schedule was offset by the loneliness and isolation she felt when she was alone while cleaning the houses (except Saturdays, when the English couple were at home). Houses were spaces empty of human contact, spaces filled with the silence that was interrupted only by the radio or the music she played in order to feel less lonely and fill the silence. The presence of the homes' inhabitants was evident in the mess of dirty laundry, dishes, unmade beds and messy bathrooms. Sometimes employers left notes with instructions for Juliana to follow; sometimes they left food for her lunch. They always left money on the table for the payment of her services. Although she managed to cope with the everyday cleaning tasks and claimed not to be really bothered by it, she occasionally talked about how she never imagined that she would work as a *faxineira* (maid). For the most part though, she suffered

the silence and isolation that characterized her work. Her way of coping with it was to develop contact with her employers whenever she could, and to avoid being alone on the weekends.

In a similar vein, Sarita from Honduras suffered the isolation of being a housecleaner. Sarita's working day started at five in the morning cleaning offices (she got the job by using a fake Spanish passport) and was followed by cleaning at different houses. Like Juliana, she spent most of her day alone and in silence. She had been working for seven years with the same employers, people that Sarita hardly ever saw but who she claimed entrusted her with their home. In contrast with many other housecleaners I met, she did not take advantage of her employers' absence to leave work early. She told me that it was "not correct" as it would be a betrayal of the trust her employers had placed in her. When talking about her job, she explained to me that she felt as if she was invisible, like a ghost entering and leaving places without having any human interaction. The invisibility that Sarita experienced every day at work was complemented by her undocumented status (as illustrated in Chapter Three). Paradoxically, the isolation that reinforced her invisibility protected her from deportation. For undocumented women like her, working as a housecleaner was the only choice. However in retrospect, she longed for her life back in Honduras and the poorly paid job that she had at a Mexican Restaurant, 'At least I felt like a human there, I spent the day talking to people. I never felt this lonely in my life' she told me. For Sarita, going back home at night to her tiny studio flat to be with her family was a respite and a reminder that she was not alone in London; 'When I see my family back home, I realise that I am still a person. I am not invisible' she told me once. Although neither Juliana nor Sarita had ever worked as domestic workers before, and although both asserted that they would not have done it back in their countries because of the occupation's subordinate status, they underplayed the personal shame they felt by contrasting the amount of money they were earning against the income they earned in their previous occupations back in their countries. As Juliana explained to me once:

If you were a *faxineira* (domestic worker) in Brazil, you would not be able to construct a house like the one I am constructing right now in Minas. However, if you come here and become a *faxineira*, you can earn enough money to build a house like mine.

For both women, domestic work offered the possibility to achieve their aims. In the case of Juliana, this was to build her dream house, and in the case of Sarita, it was to pay off her debts

back in Honduras. The prospects of a better future helped them deal with the everyday alienation included in domestic work.

In contrast with the alienation and loneliness that Juliana and Sarita experienced and tried to overcome, other women found it appealing and liberating to work alone in empty houses. They preferred not to have a person bossing you around all day long. For women like Jovanna and Cecilia from Santa Cruz, Bolivia, entering and leaving houses without having contact with their employers allowed them to deal with a job they had never envisaged themselves as doing and felt embarrassed about it. At the same time, empty houses allowed Jovanna and Cecilia the liberty to work at their own pace, be their own bosses and feel as if the spaces were temporarily theirs. In contrast with Sarita who had a strict work ethic, for Cecilia and Jovanna cheating was not a problem. As long as the houses were clean and employers stayed satisfied, it did not matter if they finished the work in only one hour instead of two. Moreover, for them (among others), the less personal contact they had with employers the better. Being a housecleaner who was able to remain invisible offered them the freedom to sustain their private lives in London, separated from and without being touched by their working lives. For Cecilia and Jovanna the idea of establishing relationships with their employers was completely alien. For both women, the loss of status and the shame of the occupation characterised the way in which they maintained themselves as service providers who did not want to develop any close intimacy with employers. It was an occupation that, as Jovanna put it, was “not a real job”, but was her only choice for the time being. Housecleaning had the advantage of being able to establish a personal distance with employers. It gave her the opportunity to have a life independent of work, with more freedom and control over the job and time.

However, for others, the “freedom and control” that characterised housecleaning domestic work paradoxically created feelings of alienation and further personal dislocations, mainly because of the lack of personal interactions. For Juliana and Sarita performing their jobs in spaces devoid of human interaction only reinforced their general invisibility and personal dislocations. In what follows, I present some stories that represent a sharp contrast with the experiences of housecleaners recounted above. The stories of live-out and live-in domestic workers – that is women who worked as nannies/housekeepers - whose lives, far from being dogged by isolation, were characterized by conundrums resulting from the physical intimacy between employers and employees.

Nannies/housekeepers and the working of physical intimacy

'It is impossible to do anything around the house without having Paola watching over my shoulder and giving me instructions on what to do around the house. It is exhausting, I wish I could be alone in the house doing my own thing, working at my own pace' Cristina told me. Women who worked as live-out and live-in domestic workers, that is, those who worked as nannies and housekeepers and were required to engage in personal interactions with their employers. While live-out domestic workers did not live in the house of their employers, live-in domestic workers worked and lived with their employers and their work was characterised by the experience of close physical intimacy and emotional labour. Women who worked as live-in domestic workers found their private lives entirely intertwined with work, but for many of them it represented the best paid form of domestic work that offered financial security. Because of its characteristics, gaining access to live-in domestic work was not as easy as to housecleaning work.

As live-in domestic workers lived in the houses of their employers, many employers tended to use either agencies or other intermediaries to hire an appropriate person. However, although there are several recruitment agencies specialising in offering the services of live-in domestic workers, none of my informants used them (see Anderson, 2000 for a discussion on placement agencies within Europe). Instead, women who worked as live-in domestic workers came from Spain and used the contacts provided by the Catholic Church to find a job in London. The Catholic Church of St. Mary in Chelsea, West London, was an efficient recruitment agency for those who, first of all, had European passports, were Catholic and wanted to work in the surrounding neighbourhoods. The nuns at the church, who were mainly Spanish, functioned as a point of liaison between rich families in the area that were in need of a live-in domestic worker and recently-arriving migrants. Although the nuns, according to Cristina from Ecuador, were looking for younger women they were still giving jobs to more mature women. These were mothers and were believed to be more patient with children and better able to deal with the idiosyncratic behaviour of their young employers. From the point of view of my informants, the Catholic Church was valuable for networking purposes and for the fact that the church was located in one of the most expensive and exclusive areas of London. Getting a hold of a job through the nuns meant that women would be working in the neighbourhood among rich

families: something they regarded as desirable.

As I have explained in the Introduction, becoming a sex or a domestic worker was experienced as occupational downward mobility and hence a form of personal dislocation. Therefore, for some women working in a rich and exclusive neighbourhood in London with a rich family allowed them to think of themselves as different from their counterparts elsewhere. As Amelia from Venezuela told me once, they were housekeepers, not maids. Apart from earning more in wages than housecleaners and live-out domestic workers, they could claim to be living in exclusive neighbourhoods of the city, among the upper classes of London, instead of sharing a flat with other migrants somewhere else in the city (an aspect that provoked discontent in many of my informants). For Amelia, working in a rich area of London was indispensable to feeling less of a *cachifa* (maid in Venezuela). By working as a live-in nanny/housekeeper in West London (Holland Park) she was negotiating the status that the occupation took away from her, 'It is not the same to be a *cachifa* in Holland Park as it is to be a *cachifa* or a cleaner in Elephant and Castle' Amelia told me on several occasions.

Still, even though women thought of live-in domestic work as different from housecleaning and live-out domestic work, it included the performance of similar type of activities around the house, similar relationships with employers and brought similar problems. There were, then, certain similarities between the different types of domestic work. The main contrasts between them were related to the intense and close form of physical intimacy between worker and employer that live-in domestic workers experienced.

Women who worked as live-in domestic workers generally followed a standard working pattern. They all had similar schedules and carried out similar activities. They usually started working at seven in the morning and finished their shifts ten to twelve hours later, with one hour a day for lunch and rest. Their everyday tasks included cleaning the house, washing clothes, cooking, ironing and caring for the children. Cristina worked in a three-storey house that was - at least from my point of view and judging by her exhaustion - absurdly big for only one person to clean. There were glass windows and glass doors all over the house, white marble floors and white walls that had to be kept pristine. There were hardly any decorative objects around the house, which meant that Cristina needed to keep the space immaculate because it was easy to catch a dirty spot or dust. On Mondays, she was in charge of hoovering and mopping the third

and second floor of the house. Tuesdays were dedicated to wiping the huge wall-to-wall glass windows of the different rooms of the house. Wednesdays were reserved for the deep cleaning of the kitchen and the five bathrooms. On Thursdays, she was required to Hoover the main bedrooms, clean the playroom and the first floor; and on Fridays she had to clean the rest of the house, wash and iron clothes. Cristina's work was under the daily supervision of her employer Paola (from Italy) who did not work and hence was at home most of the time. On Saturdays Cristina had to be on call to respond to whatever demand Paola made of her. She was finally set free at two in the afternoon, when her working week concluded. Sunday was her day off. These daily routine activities were complemented by helping Paola care for a six-months-old baby girl and two boys (aged six and four).

Following a similar routine to Cristina was Amelia who, apart from her duties cleaning a four-storey house (with the help of a housecleaner), was the full-time nanny of a four-year-old boy. She was required to cook for the child, take him to the park every afternoon, bathe him and play with him every day. Without much notice, Amelia was often required to baby-sit the boy at night while her employers (a Swedish woman and her English husband) went out. Like Cristina, Amelia also worked shifts of ten to twelve hours a day and only had one and a half days off. Both of them constantly found themselves multitasking between carrying a crying baby and hovering or mopping the floors. They were both under the surveillance of their female employers and because they lived in the houses of their employers, there was a tacit expectation that they were available at all times of the day.

Amelia lived in a studio flat located in the basement of her employer's home, while Cristina lived in a detached flat adjacent to her employers' home. Accommodation was part of the contract with the caveat that a monthly amount was deducted from their wages as rent payment. They both had exclusive use of a kitchen, bathroom and bedroom. While they were not entitled to make any changes to the place in terms of decoration, they could enjoy their own privacy. But not all women enjoyed the same benefits and privacy. Rosa from Peru, for example, lived in one of the rooms inside the house of her employers in Kensington, West London, and shared a bathroom with the children. Rosa had very little privacy and, apart from the everyday cleaning and cooking duties at work, she had to deal with the idiosyncrasies of her employer who closely monitored her work on a daily basis. Though Rosa's duties did not include taking care of the children, as they were already teenagers, she was obliged to take care of the family in other ways

- chiefly through the cooking of their meals.

Since women lived where they worked they all complained about not having a life outside of work. Their lives unfolded within the homes of their employers' family spaces; spaces that were nonetheless unfamiliar to them. Live-in domestic work, in particular, trespasses the intimacy of home in a more complex way than the work performed by housecleaners and live-out domestic workers. Domestic work in general sees a woman doing the reproductive labour that she formerly did back at home for her family: a matter of some psychic disconnect because it is done for someone else and in someone else's home. Live-in domestic work magnifies such conundrums to an even greater degree, because of the enforced physical intimacy between employer and employee and the constant performance of emotional labour. For Hochschild (1983), for example, the flight attendants of her research engaged in the performance of emotional labour through deep acting, which left them feeling alienated from their own emotions. In other words, because of the job, real emotions were confounded by the acting of emotions. While I would certainly affirm that many of the women experience an emotional dislocation while faking interest and were forced to hide their discontent and tiredness (or as I will present in the next chapter sexual pleasure in the case of sex workers), I wish to argue that the emotional labour that is performed within any type of intimate labour might result in unintended emotional intimacies and actual care. The analysis of intimate labour that requires emotional labour, in contrast to other occupations in the service economy, exposes the thin lines that exist between emotional labour and care. The spatial setting and the skills that are required to work as a domestic worker and sex worker are conducive to the development of non commoditised intimacy. It is necessary then to explore the conflicted settings in which this "intimacy" took shape and was modified.

Gendered labour troubles

In this part of the chapter I will focus in particular on how intimacy both produces and arises out of conflicted relationships between employers and domestic workers. It is precisely these complex relationships between employers and employees (on which the literature on domestic work has focused), that suggests that the familiarity and intimacy developed between employer and employee can result in the implementation of various disciplinary methods used to control and exercise power over domestic workers. This literature also explains that domestic workers

circumvent these forms of control through strategies of negotiation and resistance (see Constable 1997, Anderson 2000, Parreñas 2001, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, Lutz 2008, Moukarbel 2009 and Frantz 2010). My focus on these conflicted relationships is, then, a way to talk about the politics and power relations that are embedded in domestic work, and to show how they *emerge from* the personalised domesticity that such work entails.

Most of my informants who worked as domestic workers were in their mid 50s (except for Mariana who was thirty nine years old) this was an aspect that sharply contrasted with the age of their employers who were generally in their mid 30s and early 40s. Consequently, in some cases age - intertwined with notions of status - was used by domestic workers as a signifier of maturity, and for some women a way to cope with the idiosyncrasies of 'young inexperienced employers', as Amelia used to refer to Gabriela (her thirty-eight-year-old employer). As a fifty-seven-year-old woman and a mother, Amelia claimed to know everything about the house and the children. She knew how to '*llevar la casa*' (maintain the house) she had been *la mujer de la casa* (woman of the house) back in Venezuela, bossed around maids and therefore found it very difficult to follow the demands of her employer. Amelia was constantly frustrated, especially at the way in which Gabriela spoiled her four-year-old son, something that according to Amelia, was a recipe for disaster. However, she could not correct her employer, she was not the grandmother (even though she felt like one in relation to the boy), and thus could not intervene in the education of the little boy, at least not when Gabriela was around. When it came to the administration of home, Amelia's frustrations and desire to act according to what she thought was right had to be subsumed under Gabriela's orders. In her relationship with Gabriela, it was made clear to Amelia that she was a worker who was receiving a payment for her services; her job was not to give advice or instructions, and in the cases where Amelia changed the rules, like swapping the order of the glasses and plates in the kitchen - as she once did - she was told off. Amelia's sporadic attempts to alter or subvert the rules her boss imposed were met with sharp rebuffs from her employer which served as a reminder that she was merely the domestic help paid to do a job and follow orders; such reality checks were a cause of considerable frustration and humiliation for Amelia.

Whenever there was a conflict between the two of them, Gabriela used the written contract that they had signed in order to remind her of her duties and responsibilities. The contract protected her as a worker and offered her the benefits that few women enjoyed. However,

Amelia believed that having a contract augmented the distance between them by defining her role as a worker. As a tactic to redefine or lessen that distance, Amelia sometimes engaged in duties that went beyond those listed in her contract and performed other tasks that in her view would result in Gabriela's recognition of her as more than merely a domestic worker. These small tactics were complemented by the caring work, and more importantly by the caring feelings that she had for the little boy (an aspect that I will further discuss in this chapter).

In contrast to Amelia, Rosa did not have a written contract but a tacit contract which was based on the debt she had to her employer. As explained in Chapter Two, Rosa migrated to London in order to pay back a debt that she had accumulated in Spain. Later, to avoid further borrowing from a loanshark, she also took a loan of £5000 from her employers in London, to whom she was thus now also indebted. Because of her debt to her London employers, Rosa was committed to work for this family until she had repaid the money. As part and parcel of being indebted, Rosa was forced to comply with the restrictions imposed on her in terms of accommodation, rules and food. One of these was the fact that, even though Rosa cooked for the family and was highly appreciated for her culinary skills (something she said made her different from the housecleaner who worked at the house), she was not in a position to eat the food she cooked for the family. Her boss, a forty-year-old Spanish lady, only provided enough ingredients for Rosa to cook for the family. On one occasion when I asked Rosa why she did not eat the food she cooked, she told me that her boss had a strict rule about separating the food for the family and her own food. Rosa also mentioned that after spending half of the day cooking for the family she was too tired to cook for herself and therefore she usually ended up eating simple things like sandwiches or cereal (see Constable 1997:99-101 and Moukarbel 2009:337). Besides food restrictions, Rosa's employer restricted her telephone calls and her days off. She only had half of Sunday off, a day that she used to go to the Catholic Church and sometimes meet up with me, Eva and Amelia. After being in London for over two years, Rosa did not know many places in London besides the church in the vicinity and the shops nearby, where she went to buy groceries for the daily meals. Raising issues with her employer regarding days off or free time to take English classes on the evenings was impossible because, according to Rosa, she had to be at home and available at all times to take care of the family. The tacit contract, constructed around the debt that Rosa had with her employers, made her feel morally obliged to them, leaving her with no real power for negotiation.

Issues around the negotiation of free time, privacy and the formalisation of a written contract were common problems among domestic workers, specifically when they were addressed or viewed as “part of the family” (see Romero 1992, Cock 1980, Bakan and Stasiulis 1997 and Constable 1997 for similar discussions). As Romero explains, being part of the family could be seen as an analogy of respect for the worker. However, she further states, this analogy can serve merely to “distort working conditions” and disguise exploitative practices within the labour relation (1992:122-26). For Cristina being part of the family meant being asked for favours - which implied extra free labour. Moreover, as “family” she was required to vacate the flat where she lived and move into one of the rooms inside the house to give her space to her employer’s family and friends visiting from Italy. This treatment of a worker as though she were a child, or what some scholars have called maternalism (Rollins 1985, Romero 1992, Anderson 2000, Parreñas 2001) which is explained as:

a one-way relationship, defined primarily by the employer’s gestures of charity, unsolicited advice, assistance and gifts. The domestic employee is obligated to respond with extra hours of service, personal loyalty, and job commitment. Maternalism underlines the deep class inequalities between employers and employees (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001:208).

Paradoxically, being called part of the family made Cristina feel less of a domestic worker whilst at the same time making her feel obliged to respond to more demands and assume other roles at work (particularly while caring for the children).

However any pretence that Cristina was on an equal footing disappeared the moment she asked Paola to formalise the labour relation through a written contract that would enable her to accumulate a pension and acquire further labour rights. According to Cristina, Paola thought such requests were importunate and a sign of ingratitude on her part. They felt that because she was treated like “family”, she did not need a formal contract for the labour that she was providing. A few months after Cristina’s request, the family dismissed her from her job as they claimed that they were bringing Luca’s (Paola’s husband’s) old nanny from Italy to take care of the children – once again because she was “like family”. Cristina was given a month’s notice but because she had no formal contract she received no redundancy pay for the time she had worked there.

The stories that I have presented, so far, bring to light the conundrums that rose as a result of the physical intimacy that employers and domestic workers shared in the work space. The

presence of a stranger in the intimate space of the home resulted, paradoxically, in constant negotiations to construct boundaries between the status of the worker and the status of the boss. Yet negotiations were not always possible. There were cases in which employers delineated strict and inflexible divisions between them and the worker, divisions that sometimes resulted in extreme forms of humiliation and abusive practices.

For Mariana from Brazil, who worked as a housecleaner for an Italian lady when she initially arrived in London, the relationship with her employer was unbearable, in part because it was subject to no negotiation whatsoever. Mariana's duties around the house included cleaning, washing, ironing and Hoovering. She had to perform these activities in the presence and under the surveillance of her employer, who constantly humiliated her by forcing her, for example, to work on her knees while cleaning the floor with a small brush. While cleaning, her employer made fun of her and overtly humiliated her by saying how nice it was to have a personal slave. Even though there was a live-in domestic worker at the house, who was also a nanny, it was Mariana who was required to perform the most menial and dirty jobs around the house. She thought of these mistreatments as a reflection of her employer's own personal issues and unhappiness.

'Just because you are doing a mechanical and manual work and not an intellectual activity does not mean that you are stupid,' Mariana told me. The separation between manual and intellectual work was something she had taken for granted back in Brazil when she, herself, had hired domestic workers. Her current situation and experience in London made her reflect upon the reduced status she was currently enduring. It forced her, as a result, to think about her own status as the employer of a domestic worker back in Brazil. For Mariana, domestic work had now acquired a different dimension and value and, as she told me before going back to Brazil, she would never again see domestic work as a menial low skilled occupation.

While Mariana's case was an extreme, in the sense that it allowed for no argument or discussion, most relationships between employers and employees were defined by negotiations that took place between them. Given that my informants' direct employers were women, these relationships included two people who shared a gender identity in common but were juxtaposed because of having different backgrounds, ages, classes and social statuses, yet they were required to come to agreement with each other on a day-to-day basis. As with Mariana, most of my

informants had enjoyed the services of domestic workers back in their countries where they had been the women in charge. In London, in contrast, they experienced downward social mobility which forced them to reconsider the politics embedded in such an occupation. Some women longed for those days in their past lives when they had been different and more powerful people; they could not wait to recuperate their status, as the woman of the house, in order to hire maids that would work for them (see Parreñas 2001:172). Others, like Mariana, explained that it would be very difficult for her to hire a domestic worker without being aware of the difficulties and the inequalities that the occupation enhanced between people, above all, between women.

Overall, then, the interaction between middle-class migrant women from Latin America and their respective employers was marked by socio-economic differences. Concomitant with these differences, age also played an important role in delineating the gender relationships between employer and employee. The differences, as shown in these examples, were mediated through migrants' ideas of class and social status. As Anderson has explained, domestic work is not necessarily definable in terms of tasks but in terms of a role that situates the domestic worker within certain social relationships that are structured by individuals with specific backgrounds and biographies (2000:21).

Moralities at work

Having discussed the characteristics of different kinds of domestic work and explored the contested implications of intimacy, this section moves forward into an exploration of the consequences of the commodification of such intimacy. It explores the ethical choices that women used to deal with the different outcomes of their occupation. These choices, I argue, were used as tactics in order, on the one hand, to cope with the downward occupational status of domestic work and, on the other, to deal with the conundrums that emerged from the commodification of intimacy. I will particularly focus on the cases and moments when women had to take care of children or elderly people and thus made the ethical personal choice to care (or not). My aim is to understand, as Constable has proposed, "how the commodification of intimate relations is understood and experienced by those involved in such relationships and processes" (2009:54). In the cases I studied, women exercised individual choices, or what might

be interpreted as agency connected to their own moral understanding of kinship and notions of care. As a result, agency must be understood as an “aspect of situations in which people may find themselves and how with this effect is created by attributions of responsibility” (Laidlaw 2010:147). In this logic, this agency is intrinsically linked to their own ethics and to the responsibilities (and sometimes blame) that accompanied it whenever they chose to care or not. Laidlaw has suggested that the term agency is pre-emptively selective, as we as anthropologists, only mark actions as agency “when people’s choices seem to be to be right ones” (2002:315). But, the actions of my informants - for example when they chose not to care - were not necessarily perceived or explained by them as the right ones. While I argue that women played out some form of choice we must take into account that those choices were embedded and constrained by a wider social ideology of womanhood and motherhood. Although women have been said to have a morality based on an ethics of care, as opposed to a morality based on justice as men do (Gilligan 1982), it could be argued that an ethics of care understood as intrinsically female could serve as an ideology to keep women in a particular disadvantage place and within particular female roles. The danger of equating care with femininity naturalises women’s morality as one based on an ethics of care, without taking into account the social implications that this implies in terms of rights and responsibilities. When I talk about the choice to reflect and engage in an ethics of care in this chapter, I am referring to a localised ethics that emerges from the commodification of intimacy and the relationships that women developed with the people they worked and cared for. The ethics of care that I am referring to are those ethical practices, which were framed by judgment and which enabled the recuperation of different aspects of their personhood.

Above, I have contrasted the work of housecleaners with that of live-in nannies/housekeepers in relation to the experiences of isolation (and freedom) versus physical intimacy (and virtual enslavement). Here, I seek to explain that, above and beyond the physical intimacy - even though this was important - some housecleaners also engaged in relationships with employers that evolved into caring relationships. Let me illustrate with Vilma’s story. Sixty-five year old Vilma from Santa Cruz, Bolivia, worked every day as a housecleaner during the mornings and helped her daughter Jovanna by caring for her granddaughter Sisely in the evenings while Jovanna was at work. Vilma worked in seven different houses in South London for different employers, both women and men. One of her employers was a gay male couple who

lived in Brixton, Southwest London. Vilma, a fervent Catholic, initially found it very hard to understand and accept the fact that two men could be in a romantic relationship. She was aware of her own prejudices (which included different expressions of racism against black people) but, as she told me, found herself having to revise and adjust the way she thought about her previous values because of the diversity with which London confronted her. The acceptance of her gay employers slowly occurred as a result of the gratitude that both men constantly expressed towards her. One of them spoke Spanish and quite often left messages for Vilma thanking her for her services and her attention to detail. Sometimes these notes were accompanied by a tip or a small gift, like a box of chocolates. These displays of gratitude were for her a signal of respect and appreciation that no one had shown for her before. As she once explained to me, she had been cleaning and caring for her own family for many years, but no one had recognised the work she did. Cleaning, cooking and washing had been part of her daily routine back in Bolivia; these tasks had been part of her life as a wife and a mother and it was what she had been educated to do. Now in London, she was not only earning money from something she had previously done back home “for nothing”, but this time she was respected and, more importantly, appreciated. She further explained to me that the fact that people cared about her work made her feel less of a maid: instead she felt as if she was cleaning the houses of friends. The care work that Vilma performed through intimate labour was no longer unrecognized and although she received a salary for her caring services, she felt less of a worker and more of a caring woman.

In a similar vein but in a different register, Juliana’s choice to care developed from the relationships that she established with some employers. Saturdays, she said, were her favourite working days. Besides cleaning Peter’s house, Juliana was often invited to stay for lunch with Peter and his wife who loved Brazil. On one occasion, Juliana told me that she was invited to Peter’s birthday party, she went to the party accompanied by her son and was thrilled by the fact that Peter had invited her and introduced her as a friend to his acquaintances. According to Juliana this was proof that he made no distinction between her as the housecleaner, and him as the employer, they were also friends. ‘No one invites the maid to the party, people from different social classes in Brazil do not mingle’, she said. This, for her, was the main difference between being a domestic worker in London and one in Brazil. In Juliana’s view, domestic work in London was seen as similar to any other job, a job that some people respected and appreciated; consequently this allowed a space where some of the social differences between employers and

employees were blurred. As already explained, Juliana suffered from the isolation of the job, however she used the brief encounters with employers as opportunities to develop relationships so that she would feel less alienated. In part, this was due to Juliana's personality and approach to the work. Her efforts and choices to engage in friendships with certain employers served as moments in which she surmounted the invisibility and alienation of her work. Not all employers were the same and not all of them really cared or treated her as an equal. Hence Juliana did not care for all of her employers. Still, she judged the respect that some employers showed for her as an important value. As Arendt suggests, "discernment of judgment is resolutely nonindividualistic; judgment occurs "in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement"" (Arendt cited in Lambek 2010:26). Judging the relationships with different employers enabled her to enact forms of care and, at the same time, to feel as her "real self".

Needless to say, the presence and physical interaction between employers and employees had a fundamental impact on women's choices. For example, forty-year-old Felipa from Mexico, who was brought to London twenty years ago under a domestic worker visa, before becoming a housecleaner and live-out domestic worker, was morally conflicted by the intimate labour she had to provide for an elderly English woman. Over the last three years she had been working twice a week for this employer. Besides cleaning the house, she was in charge of attending to the needs of this woman for five hours during the day. As Felipa told me, the old woman was very demanding and sometimes unkind and abusive towards her. The old woman was, as Felipa put it, 'hard work', as she constantly asked her to perform tasks around the house that she had already accomplished, complained about everything and blamed her for things she had forgotten about or lost.

Still, Felipa could not help but feel morally obliged to care for this woman. Her sense of moral conflict originated from the fact that she equated her employer with her own mother, imagining that her mother too would age and that she would eventually require someone to care for her when that happened. Regardless of the lack of emotional intimacy with her employer and the emotional labour she had to perform, she made the decision to care based on a sense of moral duty. It was an overt decision that made her feel as though she was being true to herself. Furthermore, caring represented, for Felipa, a way to work out the longing feeling she had for her own mother and the roles she thought she should be playing, but was unable to play, in her

mother's life. In many respects, through caring for her elderly employer, she was momentarily recuperating her social role and status as a daughter. In addition, mistreating the old woman was entirely against what she believed in as good values. For her, caring was the right thing to do. Felipa, like others, often found herself faced with what Robbins calls a value conflict. When conflict arises between values, a morality of freedom and choice comes into play, and as a result people become aware of choosing their own fates. "And it is because in such cases people become aware of choosing between values that they come to see their decision-making process as one engaged with moral issues" (Robbins 2007:300). For Robbins it is necessary to understand the nature of value conflicts in order to understand the moral practice that takes shape through the experience of freedom and the making of choices. Felipa's choices emerged from her own experience and judgment of a value conflict regarding the well or ill treatment of an old person who, on top of everything, reminded her of her own kinship relationships.

Similar value conflicts emerged when women surpassed the emotional labour in their everyday lives work and engaged in emotional intimacies with the people they cared for. For instance, Mariana, after having worked for an abusive employer, started to work as a live-out nanny/housekeeper for an English/Brazilian woman. Besides basic housekeeping tasks that were shared with a housecleaner, Mariana's duties were mainly focused on caring for two children. Henrietta, her new employer, treated her with respect. She also appreciated the fact that Mariana was highly educated and therefore wanted her to get involved in the education of her children. She wanted Mariana to teach them Portuguese and help them with their daily tasks. Henrietta, in contrast to other employers, worked full-time, therefore Mariana was the person in charge of the two children during the day. Although Mariana spent the whole day working as a live-out domestic worker, the fact that Henrietta was not at home facilitated Mariana's work and eased the relationship between them. The lack of surveillance and respect for Mariana's work and person permitted the development of an emotional intimacy between Mariana and the family. Mariana's emotional labour evolved into care through the contact with the two children (five and seven years old respectively). The children reminded Mariana of her niece and nephew back in Brazil who had become orphans because of the sudden death of their mother, Mariana's sister. Like Felipa, her choice to care was structured around the longing and the present impossibility of being able to care, for her own family. Furthermore, Mariana's relationship with the children, according to what she told me, reminded her of the person she really was.

Recuperating the real person, or locating themselves in social roles that were part of their social identities as women through their intimate labour, was a common feature among women who were mothers. For some of them, caring for children appealed to their social identities as mothers and located their ethical choice to care within the framework of motherhood and the values attached to it. Much of the literature on domestic work has analysed the emotional intimacies that emanate while caring, especially for children, under the conceptual framework of transnational motherhood. Transnational motherhood involves structural changes to western ideas of motherhood, while at the same time allows women to care for their children from afar by sending money back to their countries. Moreover, it has been suggested that these transnational mothers replace the absence of their children through the caring and the development of emotional attachments towards other people's children (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001: 22-26). This term has been used as a framework to analyse the strong links that exist between women and the children they care for. Although some of my informants were mothers, their motivations to work as domestic workers were not driven by the impetus to provide for the maintenance of their children back home. This was due to the fact that most of their children were already adults. Others had their children with them in London and the rest were childless. Therefore the ethical choice to care was not directly drawn from being transnational mothers, but rather from the personal choices regarding the emotional outcomes of their work, emotional labour and notions of care.

For women like Cristina and Amelia, caring for the children was a 'natural choice', as Cristina told me once. Regardless of the relationships that both women had with their employers, Amelia loved to spend time with the four-year-old boy she took care of. Amelia considered the boy as if he was her grandchild. As far as I could observe, when the boy was around - even on Sundays when he would come down to Amelia's flat in order hang out with her - little Christopher was allowed to do as he wanted, but this did not alter Amelia's attitude. 'Look at my little boy, he is so handsome' Amelia would usually say. For her, the moments that she spent with Christopher offered her the respite and comfort she needed to endure the complex relationship she had with Gabriela, the boy's mother. Within the general discomfort, dislocations and depression, caring for Christopher, as Amelia said, was the only meaningful aspect of her life in London. By caring for Christopher, Amelia fashioned herself back into her "real self" and was able to play a social role that was familiar to her and was able to forget about her status as a domestic

worker. Despite what Gabriela thought of her, or her abusive treatment, Amelia felt as if Christopher was family to her. She could not help but love the kid and treat him as if he was her grandchild.

In a similar vein, for Cristina it was impossible not to love the baby girl she took care of. 'Look at her Ana, she smiles when she sees me, she knows I love her, she could be my grandchild', she told me on one occasion. As the grandmother of two children, she explained to me how easy it was for her to transfer her role as grandmother. Caring for the baby girl, particularly, was one of the main reasons Cristina stayed in Paola's house for so long, she wanted to be close to the baby and take care of her. The relationship with the two boys was also a caring one, but it was combined with the need to educate them. When Cristina was alone playing with the boys and whenever they misbehaved, she corrected them. On one occasion, I was with her at work and, because Paola was not at home, Cristina was in charge of taking care of the three children by herself. While we were at the playroom with the kids one of them in the middle of a tantrum hit Cristina on the head with a toy. She told him off and in a loving way she explained that it was not right to hit other people, that she loved him and that if he kept on behaving like this, she would not love him anymore. The child was ashamed of what he had done and asked her to forgive him, he promised he would not do it again. She was patient and caring. Although she did not have to care for them as part of her job, the ethical choice of doing so eased her exhaustion and sense of dislocation. This was her tactic to cope with the commodification of intimacy that provoked so much conflict among my informants.

When Cristina was dismissed from Paola's house (when she asked for a contract), in her moments of frustration and anger she promised me that she would not take a job that involved caring for children because it was too painful to leave them behind (*c.f.* Hondageu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). However, after a few months of working as a housekeeper, Cristina started working as a live-out nanny/housekeeper for a young woman from Vienna, Andrea, who had two children. Andrea told me that Cristina was like a grandmother to her children; she was thankful to know that she did not have to worry about leaving her children with a stranger. Andrea felt that Cristina cared for the whole family as if it was her own. Here again, Cristina was "like family". But this time that status involved the respect, dignity and emotional intimacy that she had never experienced at Paola's home.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined how, regardless of doing one form of domestic work or the other, women are arguably filling the “care deficit” that Ehrenreich and Hochschild talk about. My informants became intimate labourers who were in charge of caring for other people’s households. Their work contributed to the gender inequalities within the home between men and women, and the wider inequalities between affluent and less affluent women. Despite my critique of such arrangements, this chapter has shown how women enacted tactics and a form of personal agency to cope with the problems that emerged from such labour relations.

I have shown how some women enjoyed the independence and autonomy of working in isolated circumstances by having no contact whatsoever with their employers. At the same time, I have explained how for some women this isolation intensified their sense of personal dislocations in London, and as a result some women made efforts to establish more personal contact with employers. This was indeed magnified when women, who worked as live-in domestic workers, were drawn into intimacy because of the extreme physical contact that they had with their employers. Having explained the conflicts created by the physical intimacy and the power relations that are embedded in domestic work, I further showed how women made the ethical choice to care, especially when caring for children and old people. This required them to expend emotional energy in their relationships with employers – and particularly with children – that could turn into wasted effort when, for example, they were dismissed. I suggested that women’s ethical choices were practices that emerged from the commodification of intimacy, therefore one could argue that while women’s choices to care were partly defined by their social set up (that of intimate labour and the intimacy of the job), their “ethics of care” stemmed from their individual understanding of kinship relations and their social roles within these. It is an ethical practice that enunciates personalised decisions in response to one’s own circumstances but at the same time is highly contextual. Building on this chapter’s analysis, the following chapter examines the lives of women who switched from domestic to sex work. It shows how ethical choices, forged in the context of sex work, shaped the meanings of the different social identities of women and restructured notions of the self.

Chapter Five

Beyond the commodification of intimacy: ethical choices

'When this is over in December, I will go back to my life and my son in Brazil. Everything will go back to normal; I will go back to who I really am.' Sabrina, a 45-year-old sex worker from Sao Paulo, was often keen to emphasise this to me during my research. Two things are striking about what Sabrina says. Firstly, she desires to return to normality; and secondly, she envisages a future in which she returns to who she 'really' is. What, however, did she mean by 'normal'? Sabrina explained to me that it implied two things: going back to her previous life in Brazil, and leaving behind her life as a prostitute in London. In asserting a need to recuperate the normal or an identity she expressed as her real self, Sabrina was concerned about whether she would be able to cleanse herself from the pollution generated by prostitution. Although being a sex worker was a choice that many of my informants made, it was nevertheless a choice that, for various reasons, encroached upon their morality and personhood.

The stories that I will present are stories of women who made the difficult decision to become prostitutes. While entry into sex work was a deliberate choice over other limiting and exploitative forms of labour (e.g., domestic work), women became prostitutes in order to earn a living for themselves and for those who were economically dependent upon them. It was a decision made within a very limited range of options and was for many the only choice available to enable them to further their personal dreams and aspirations. That is, none of them had real opportunities to get a job in other occupations because of wider structural limitations such as lack of documentation, deficiencies in learning and speaking English, weak social networks and social capital, and lack of recognition of former labour experience and education. Therefore, the "chosen" dimension requires that we interrogate on the one hand, the arguments made by radical feminist theorists who oppose sex work in any form, arguing that "choosing" sex work always entails a degree of coercion or force, and on the other, the liberal approach which sees entering into sex work as a "free" and unconstrained choice. Indeed my informants "chose" to enter into

sex work without being coerced in any form. However, the fact that the “choice” was conditioned by structural inequalities and that it entailed personal and moral challenges - especially in terms of love, relationships and family - must equally give us pause before advocating that we see their actions in terms of “free will”. It was a personal choice but nonetheless, a highly constrained one. How then did women manage to live with their “choice” and the personal dislocations that emerged from it while in London?

One part of the answer resides in the space that migration offered and in the temporariness that sex work represented in their lives. Whether they wanted to return to their countries or stay in London, sex work was perceived as a transient job in their present lives. That is, sex work represented a rupture in time. It was a bracketed time separated from who they really were. It provided “an exceptional inversion of mainstream practice”, that may be overcome in the future “with luck, prayer and effort” (Day et. al 1999:2). The present thus functioned as a temporary space in which they were required to develop different aspects of the working persona needed in the new occupation. The stories of these women reflect a time dislocation between the time in their lives before they worked as sex workers, the present, and the future when they no longer saw themselves as sex workers. This set of temporal discontinuities helped them to reconcile themselves to the morally problematic character of their working lives.

The second part of the answer relates to the everyday practices that women engaged with in order to deal with the conundrums created by the occupation. Within their lives as sex workers and because of the stigma attached to the job, women experienced their identities as separated in two different persons; the working persona and the “real person”. As I have explained in the Introduction, the disconnection between the “real” and “work” selves (Zaretsky 1976) was exacerbated by the nature of their intimate work, its low status and in some cases its illegality. Moreover, in addition to these disconnections, women who “chose” to become sex workers experienced a further identity rupture provoked by moral conundrums. In this chapter I will argue that women dealt with these ruptures and dislocations through ethical choices: lying, on the one hand, and caring, on the other. Such choices allowed them to fashion themselves into a particular kind of person who was located within various social relationships: a person who, as Laidlaw suggests, “might not be a stable coherent ‘self’ at all, but rather ‘distributed’, so to say between the different kind of subject one is in different situations” (1995:20) and within different social relationships. Ethical choices allowed women to keep their new London-person

distinct from their previous social identities back home. And although their choices collided with what they thought of as right and wrong, and were somehow counter-intuitive, they found it necessary to keep these persons separate to maintain themselves as moral persons.

In order to contextualise this argument I will first describe the reasons that women narrated to explain their gradual shift from domestic to sex work and the incremental steps that they were required to take in order to realign themselves to the new occupation. Second, I will explain how the stigma attached to sex work provoked personal and moral dislocations that forced women to question their own values, social identities and roles that they held back home. Third, I will describe how through the practices of lying and caring women fashion themselves into temporary different persons that, on the one hand, responded to new social relationships – both commercial and personal - and on the other, allowed them to protect and recuperate what they called their “real persons”. I will show how my informants experienced different painful personal dislocations, and will explore their coping mechanisms for dealing with such dislocations through ethics.

From domestic to sex work: doing it for money

The first time I met Sabrina was at a private flat in East London where she had been working for the last six months. She opened the door of the flat wearing a fluffy red robe. Sabrina is a slim, fit, brunette with honey coloured eyes, long dark straight hair and ‘indigenous’ looks of which she is proud. After letting me in and asking me to come to her room in complete silence, because other girls were working in other rooms of the flat, she lay down on her satin bed-sheets and started bombarding me with questions about me and my research. She was intrigued by the fact that I wanted to do a research with migrant women from Latin America but, as she explained to me afterwards, she thought that her story needed to be told. Her story, she maintained, was one of many stories of women, like her, who had previously never thought about becoming prostitutes in a foreign country.

Sabrina arrived in London in 2007 with her son Alex, then aged nine years old. Like many other migrant women, she envisioned London as the land of opportunities and the place where her son could have a better life. She came to London prepared to work as a cleaner and, maybe, to

save money and become competent in English. After being a domestic worker for two years and struggling to earn enough money to live on, to have free time to spend with Alex, or to learn English, Sabrina, being good-looking and having been approached by a close friend who was already working as a dancer in night clubs, decided to become a strip dancer. As she told me, the motivation to start working as a stripper was economic. In only a few hours she could earn at least twice what she earned as a domestic worker. As a domestic worker, Sabrina earned an average of £250-300 a week working eight to ten hours a day, six to seven days a week. By contrast, as a stripper/dancer, she was able to earn £500-600 a week working three to four hours a day. Indeed, working as a stripper (and eventually as a prostitute) offered Sabrina the opportunity to materialise her economic migration goal: to go back to Sao Paulo and buy a house.

Nevertheless the shift to sex work was not a seamless or an easy process. On the contrary, it was gradual and piecemeal, as she was required to take a series of incremental steps that included an occupational realignment and a personal adaptation. The first step was to diversify her sources of income, working two or more jobs daily. During the day she continued to work as a domestic worker as well as administering migrant houses in North London where a big community of Brazilians live. In agreement with the landlord, her duties included general maintenance and collecting weekly rent for the rooms in the different houses (the tenants were mostly other Brazilians). In exchange, she paid reduced rent and made a small commission. During the evenings she began working as a dancer at strip clubs. Her new work strategy enabled her to start saving money but, unwilling to leave Alex alone every night, her night/dance shifts were limited. For a few months, Sabrina juggled three jobs while also taking care of her son, but she frequently complained that she felt exhausted and was unable to dedicate proper time or energy to him. Consequently, she felt she was neglecting Alex and not fulfilling her role as a mother. As well as feeling guilty, Sabrina struggled with the dilemma over whether she should return to domestic work, or enter into sex work and be able to earn more money. Alex's future and her wider motherly obligations of care converged and influenced Sabrina's decision to enter into the sex work industry in order to gain the economic stability and affluence she had planned and hoped for. The decision changed her life in two major ways. Firstly, she was forced to send Alex back to Brazil where he would be taken care of by her mother and aunt. Secondly, she began her life in London as a sex worker, a job and a lifestyle she had never previously imagined for herself.

Family obligations and expectations of a better life had an important impact on women's decisions to enter into the sex work industry. Like Sabrina, Amanda earned £250 a week as a domestic worker, giving her barely enough money to pay for her shared room, food and transport costs. After living expenses she was left with very little - sometimes nothing at all - to send back to her children in Brazil. Prior to migrating Amanda had not intended to work as a domestic worker which was poorly paid and also perceived as a demeaning occupation. Earning little more than she had as a school teacher back in Brazil, Amanda's expectations of making a small fortune in London were quickly dismantled: 'Brazilians get here thinking that they will exploit a gold mine in London and when they get here their dreams turn into sand castles that collapse as soon as they realise how expensive everything is', she told me.⁶⁶ Not only were women disillusioned by the harsh economic reality of living in London, but the jobs they undertook – as mentioned - represented a downward shift in status.

By describing women's occupational change from domestic to sex work I am not suggesting that sex work was perceived by informants as holding a higher status. However, sex work offered the opportunity to earn a significantly higher income that was needed to sustain their desired life style and families. Nonetheless, entering into the sex work industry provoked serious moral dilemmas for my informants that collided with what they thought of as sound moral values. For some, structuring their choice around narratives of family obligation and wider conceptions of care was a way to ease their moral guilt. However, whilst many of my informants linked their occupation to kinship obligations, for others their choice was related to the pursuit of new experiences rather than to economic obligations of care. Some other reasons encompassed a combination of economic motivation and a sense of adventure.

Between money and adventure

An illustration of this is the case of Vanessa from Colombia who in contrast to other women had no children or family members to support at home. Vanessa came to London in order to study English and experience living abroad for a while. The substance of her dreams was not primarily of financial gain, as with other women, but involved a sense of adventure and experimentation.

⁶⁶ See Mahler (1995) for similar experiences among Latin American migrants regarding the American Dream.

Like many students in London, Vanessa found it hard to survive in the city with the money she had brought from home and therefore decided to work as a cleaner for a few hours early in the mornings. After a few months of working as a cleaner, she was offered work as a stripper by one of the security guards who worked in the same building. He was friendly and used to engage her in small talk after she had finished her shift. He told Vanessa that she was too pretty to be working as a cleaner and that if she really wanted to make some money she should start dancing for men in bars. He told her that the job did not require any further contact with the clients “unless you wanted” and the payment was at least five times her salary as a cleaner (at the time of the study Vanessa was earning £5.80 per hour).

She believed that being a dancer/stripper would come to her more easily than working as a cleaner, 'I do not know how to clean, I have never cleaned in my life, that is what my mom and our maid did, I am not cut out for this job'. Besides, working in clubs would give her a higher income. Becoming a stripper was for Vanessa more than a job, it was, as she told me, an opportunity to experience something radically different in her life. Vanessa thought of strip clubs as an empowering experience that provided self-confidence and gave her control over men, as well as being a place to meet potential boyfriends. 'Apart from earning good money with the tips and all, women were constantly hoping to find the man that would fall in love with them', Daniela, who worked as stripper for many years, also told me.

The expectations of finding a boyfriend while working at strip bars are illustrated by the case of Monica from Brazil, whose migration plan was to save enough money to buy a house for her elderly parents back in Minas. After working for a year as a domestic worker in London, Monica started working as a stripper in order to make more money, but more importantly, to meet a potential boyfriend. While working as a stripper, she established and developed intimate relationships with some of the men who frequented the bars. 'I was always getting into relationships with the wrong men, Portuguese, Albanians, Romanians, once a Turk, you name them, all of them bastards who wanted to take advantage and did not respect me - because I was a stripper and worked in those clubs'. The love stories ended to a greater or lesser degree in abuse and, on some occasions, attempts to pimp and exploit her. Although she enjoyed the attention she received from men while working at the strip clubs, Monica's goal of finding a partner among the clients resulted in complete disappointment. In the end being a dancer and becoming a girlfriend of some of the clients did not provide any of the advantages she was

looking for: love and money.

As a result, Monica decided to enter into prostitution and grew to be savvier about finances, hoping that by doing so she would regain the control she had lost over her emotional life. The leap into selling sex was “easy”, she told me, because she was already sleeping with clients; however this time she was getting paid for the company, time, entertainment and the sex she provided. By the time I met Monica she had been working as a sex worker for only six months at a private flat two days a week, and like the rest of my informants she envisioned the occupation as a temporary one. She was training to become a professional masseuse and a beauty consultant; her dream was to set up a massage clinic with her sister in London. After being disappointed by the “boyfriends” she met at the strip clubs, prostitution became the temporary option that offered the money she needed to establish her own business and settle more permanently in London.

Alongside women’s other reasons to enter into sex work, it is important to mention at this point that their choice was underpinned by the space that migration offered away from home. The distance allowed them to shelter their “real persons” (*c.f.* Kelly 2007 and Zheng 2009), from the stigma of the occupation. This occupation, as Sabrina told me, ‘was a pause in her life’ as she would eventually go back to her real life and, more importantly, back to a life where she would be able to recuperate her real self. In the meantime, women were required to work out the moral conflicts that emerged by the stigma of sex work.

Talking about stigma

‘I do not agree that this job is like any other job. It is not right to sell your body. If it were the same as any other job we would not have to hide it, but you do not go out on the streets saying that you are a prostitute’, Amanda from Goiania, Brazil, told me. She liked to think of herself as a *pessoa com valores moraes* (person with moral values). As a result, Amanda told me how ashamed she was and how, because of the job, she thought of herself as an immoral person, a person who was *infamada* (disaccredited). I am arguing that, in addition to the initial rupture or dislocation of migration, sex work can be understood as a second dislocation in the lives of the Latin American women I knew. The fact that sex work is experienced as a dislocation is due in

large part to the stigma attached to it. In this section I explain the consequences of this stigma for women themselves and the coping mechanisms they employed.

As Goffman states, stigma is an “attribute that is deeply discrediting and that reduces the bearer from a whole and usual person to a tainted one, discounted one” (2001:364). Sex workers are stigmatised because of particular activities that convey a gendered social identity: one that is devalued in a particular social context. Stigma in this regard entails an attribute and functions as a link between the person and undesirable characteristics, in this case between my informants and the stereotype of the prostitute. The stigma of prostitution arises in particular from thinking about sex and, more importantly, sexual intimacy as a market transaction. Indeed, it questions the selling of the body as well as the commodification of sexual intimacy and the role of women in the private sphere (Day 2007: 34-54).

Within the study of sex work there are radically different approaches to its understanding. For the radical feminists, sex work is seen as a form of violence and female oppression where the commodification of the female body becomes the ultimate symbol of patriarchal masculinity (e.g., Barry 1996, Dworkin 1997, Jeffries 1997). In contrast, the sex work or liberal feminist approach defines it as voluntary decision that, like any other occupation, can provide an income (e.g., Pheterson 1990, Bell 1994, Strossen 1995, Chapkis 1997 and Agustin 2007). Nonetheless, regardless of the intellectual and political approach to sex work, as Brewis points out “the money earned does not buy an escape from stigma” (2000:228). In spite of women’s personal experiences of sex work, they dishonour themselves in the eyes of society because of the public idioms of morality attached to the selling of sex. As I will explain in this chapter, my informants carried the burden of the stigma of the prostitute, and regardless of what they thought of the occupation, carrying this stereotype deeply influenced their feelings of shame; shame associated with the selling of the body and of a particular type of intimacy. Because of the stigma attached to sex work my informants (as many studies on sex work have suggested), were required to engage in different practices that allowed them to live comfortably with their choice.

For instance, women like Amanda engaged in cleansing activities throughout the day in order to wash away the stains and odours of sex. She was continuously cleaning the flat and taking several quick showers a day in-between clients. Beyond these, she also had a strict rule about separating the working space from her home. The flat where she and Sabrina worked as independent sex workers was, according to Amanda, polluted by the scent of sex, ‘it is impossible

to get the smell out of your nostrils. This flat is a reminder to me of being a prostitute. This is the place where I am a prostitute, I need to get out of here to feel like myself again' she told me.

By a way of contrast, Sabrina lived in the flat. It was, according to her, a better strategy for business. By living in the space where she worked, Sabrina avoided the conflicts of commuting and spending more money on two rents. Nevertheless, although she did not go to the lengths Amanda went to in order to separate work from home, Sabrina also employed different cleansing and purging practices to distance her working life from her real self. Besides taking a few showers a day, she maintained a strict distinction between the bed sheets, pillows, towels and wine glasses used by her clients from those she used. During the day Sabrina's room was replete with sex toys, leather straps on the bed, satin sheets and other gadgets, yet by night it was converted into an ordinary sleeping room where no traces of the day's activities were to be found.

Both women in their own particular ways made efforts to attain an effective separation between the working persona and the "real person". This separation also extended beyond personal strategies, as women engaged in the creation of different biographies, as well as concealment practices, which according to Goffman are necessary for the stigmatised subject to survive among "normal people" (1968:99). He explains that prostitutes in particular are individuals who must conceal their real lives from a certain class of persons (such as police), while at the same time exposing themselves systematically to other classes of persons, namely clients (Goffman 1968:94). He further explains how stigmatised individuals experience a biographical discontinuity between their past and the shady parts of their present. As Weitzer suggests, sex workers must "engage in various normalisation strategies, including compartmentalising their deviant work persona from their real identity, concealing their work from family and friends, distancing themselves from clients, using neutral or professional terms to describe their jobs, and viewing their work as a valuable profession" (Weitzer 2009:222).

As a result women created a division between these two persons, what I call the double person. This partition, I suggest, was not only parallel to the division of the working persona and the-person-beyond-work that is widely acknowledged as a consequence of the capitalist division of labour. Workers of different kinds make a separation between their identities at work and their identities at home. Yet, as Sophie Day argues, because the work site of sex work is the body, the work environment is not externally demarcated. For this reason, the division between the

two persons in sex work requires a further separation, that between the inner body and the outer body, the private and the public. Although my informants did not talk about an inner and an outer body, a similar partition pertained. This, in their terms, is the distinction between the working persona and the “real person”.⁶⁷

As I will explain, the double person, or the multiplicity of identities as Chapkis calls it, is in itself a form of emotional work in which women learn how to perform what is required by their occupation without necessarily getting involved or entangled in an emotional process with their clients (Chapkis 1997). My informants were the “exotic” Latin Americans who played certain roles according to the desires of their clients. These different personas functioned through the performance of particular forms of emotional labour: for example, the faking of sexual pleasure during sex, while women were actually thinking about their children, shopping lists, calling family or calculating their income. Likewise, as part of the emotional labour of sex work, women were required to contrive a caring person. Sex work thus entailed the fabrication of different biographies and social personas depending on the circumstance, clients and locales. But they were not prostitutes all the time; they were also women with other social identities that needed to be taken care of. These social identities defined women in different ways and more importantly were connected, as Moore has stated, “to normative or conventional explanations for the social order, as well as to legitimations of that order” (1994:92). According to Moore social identities are circumscribed within “socially established patterns of power” (1994:92). For instance, the label of ‘mother’ as a social identity defines the individual and women’s relation to “work, to social relations, to sexuality and even to life” (Moore 1994:99).⁶⁸ Moore’s argument is that households not only produce people and thereby society, but that they – along with many other institutions – produce specific sorts of persons with specific social identities and particular rights and needs (1994:93). For women, the social identities that they held back in their countries (e.g., mother, daughter, sister, girlfriend) and the social identities they wanted to maintain, separated from the sex work industry, contained specific gendered attributes and roles that they had to perform and fulfill. As a result, the double person was necessary to protect and to maintain their various social identities.

⁶⁷ The separation between the working and the real person has been widely analysed within the literature on sex work (Chapkis 1997, Day 2000, Brennan 2004, Kelly 2008, Bernstein 2007)

⁶⁸ Moore goes further to explain that the “power to define a social identity and to ascribe characteristics to that identity is a political power” (1994:92).

But what happens when people undergo dislocations in their persons, which affect their social identities? According to my informants migration and work provoked a tension or dislocation between the person at home back in their countries (real person), the person in London (the migrant person) and the future person, who was described as closer to the “real person”, yet modified. The dislocation produced by sex work resulted in the separation of the “real person” and the working persona. Because of the intricacy of such dislocations, I argue that women engaged in ethical choices as a way of fashioning themselves into different coherent personas in their relationships with others. In this regard, I intend to explore the self-fashioning practices not only as a “self-mastery” project as Foucault (1997, 2003, 2003b) suggests, but as way in which women separated out some pre-existing sense of themselves and held them apart while fashioning another person, other identities. Furthermore, self-fashioning was also intertwined and configured within women’s relations to others. As Lambek suggests, “A focus on self-fashioning can open up questions concerning how much each of us is part of others and how much myself is determined by the self-making projects of the acts of others” (Lambek 2010:16). This however, cannot be understood without taking into account the judgment that women applied before making particular choices. As Lambek states, it is necessary to take into account the role of judgment in ordinary ethics because, “practice is continuous – a matter of living one’s life – but also discontinuous, insofar as the exercise of judgment responds to changing circumstances and contingencies” (2010:27). Therefore, the ethical choices involved in self-fashioning can be understood as articulations of women’s judgments regarding different social identities and gendered roles in relation to other people, hence they are highly contextual. Self-fashioning became a decision used as a way to protect their real selves and moral values, as well as their different social identities back home. It also protected their relationship to people outside the sex work industry in London, although it implied fashioning a liar in some cases. In what follows I will explain the decisions that women made in response to their own circumstances as sex workers in London. I will argue that these choices connect, in particular, to acts of lying and caring.

Separating life from work: lying and caring

Amanda’s main conflict arose whenever she was required to fulfill her role as a mother. She often

talked about how she felt like a hypocrite (*hipocresia, falsidade*) every time she talked to her children on Skype - especially when she had to tell them off for misbehaving or disobeying their grandparents, who took care of them in Brazil. Her fourteen-year-old daughter, Thais, had been lying and secretly fleeing home in order to meet up with friends. Amanda's parents were finding it very difficult to deal with two adolescents who were rebelling against their authority. On this occasion, while talking to her daughter Thais on Skype, Amanda had to play the role of a strict and severe mother. She was telling Thais not to lie to her grandparents, that it was not right for her to run away with friends until late without her grandparents knowing where she was. During the whole conversation Amanda's voice was calm but serious. At the same time as scolding Thais, she was telling her how much she loved her and how much she was looking forward to spending time with her. When she hung up the phone she turned to Sabrina and me and said, 'How can I ask them, especially my fourteen-year-old-daughter, to behave, how can I be an example for her? She is fourteen and she will start experimenting with sex soon, I know that. What authority do I have as a prostitute to demand a certain type of behaviour from her?' In a similar vein, she constantly worried about her eighteen-year-old son Fernando coming across one of the many Internet sites she advertised on. Even though she always maintained her Internet page photos as anonymous (by erasing the face entirely), she was still frightened that she might be discovered. 'How can I pretend to be a good a mother if I am a prostitute?' Overall, she thought of herself as hypocrite; she was a religious Catholic person but refused to go to church as she felt that doing so would be in contradiction with her current actions in life. Her wider religious morality, her social identity as a mother and the fact that she had to lie were aspects in constant conflict with her present life.

To reinforce the boundary between her double person, she was compelled to lie to her family, to her parents and to her boyfriend back in Brazil. She also had to lie about her finances, which averaged between £5000 and £7000 a month. She sent part of the money as remittances to Brazil, but kept some of the money in a savings account in London. She hoped to save enough money to be able to buy a house when she went back to Brazil. How was she going to explain that money?, I asked. She said that she would tell her family that it was the result of her investing in a high rate interest account. She had it all figured out. As far as her family and boyfriend in Brazil were concerned she worked as a restaurant hostess in London and gave private Portuguese lessons to children. Her family were not the only ones she lied to. Because Amanda felt the need

to separate her working persona from her “real person”, she was also required to maintain another stream of lies in relation to the people she lived with. Her biography was fragmented among the different social identities she maintained for each of the different sets of social relationships in her life. This was further complicated the moment Amanda decided to work in brothels in order to make more money.

In the brothel where she initially worked, depending on how many clients attended and how many hours they worked, it was possible to earn from £600 to £800 a week, which was much more than Amanda had earned before. Although brothels are considered illegal under the law and girls can be easily prosecuted if caught, these places have the advantage of being secure because of the presence of other women and in some cases security guards. This sharply contrasts with the vulnerability and risk that women experience while working in private flats, an aspect that will be further explored in this chapter.

Although the money was good, working in brothels provided less anonymity than, for example, swing parties did. In brothels, several women were required to spend long periods of time with each other waiting for clients. As Amanda and other informants commented, women had to be very careful about sharing personal and business information with other girls because of the constant betrayals by co-workers. The betrayal was related to the threat of being exposed as a prostitute, but more importantly being exposed as an undocumented migrant. This disadvantage however was not exploited by madams or pimps, but by other women who perceived their co-workers as rivals who threatened their own business and earnings. Being undocumented entailed a particular experience of “friendship” and social relations that often created anxiety and distrust. For instance, women like Amanda were required to construct another social identity - that of a documented migrant - in front of others who might become a threat by exposing her illegal status in London.⁶⁹ As I have shown in Chapter Three, women - both sex and domestic workers - experienced a further dislocation in their persons and their lives because of illegality. Therefore the dislocated “person” of the undocumented migrant was parallel to the sex worker “person”. Amanda then found herself creating complex biographies and life histories to avoid any suspicion and keep her real self and identity safe.

In spite of these complexities, working at brothels offered a higher and steadier income

⁶⁹ Amanda acquired legal status in January 2010 when she married a Portuguese friend.

than strip bars and swing parties, while at the same time allowing women to have a normal life outside their occupation and juggle with different social identities. Still it was never easy to manage an efficient separation between the working and the “real person”. For instance, when Amanda decided to start working at the brothel she was living in a house where her brother-in-law lived. He came to London after her in order to earn money to pay some debts and eventually go back to Brazil. Consequently, Amanda was forced to help him finding accommodation and find his way in London. She did not want her family to know what she was really doing in London, but at the same time she did not want to raise any suspicions on her brother-in-law’s part; therefore she decided to keep him close in order to control any possible gossip that could affect her life back in Brazil. She was concerned that he would eventually discover her, as it was difficult to explain her working schedule and income while living in the same house. To avoid his suspicion Amanda decided to confess part of the story and told him that she was working as a stripper in a club at night and that during the day she worked as a babysitter for a Brazilian family. In addition to lying, Amanda started helping her brother in-law by giving him extra cash with the excuse that she was earning a good amount of money from tips at the bar. He never asked about Amanda’s work, according to her, he was very discreet and never asked her whether she was selling sex as well.

The tacit agreement of “ask me no questions and I’ll tell you no lies” allowed her to maintain her social identities “intact”. The lie, which Amanda suspected the brother-in-law did not believe, gave her an opportunity to mask the uncomfortable reality. As Zigon states, “truth telling and lying are situationally and [contextually] negotiated, questioned, and worked-through in different ways by different persons within and beyond [the] social context” (2009:273). In other words, lying was morally appropriate. The agreement between them lasted until he left London, when Amanda gave him a “gift” of £800 to take back to Brazil. Telling the truth was not an option, as Amanda believed that by doing it she would transfer the stigma of the occupation to her family and friends. Lying was the only possible way in which she could fashion other persons that would enable her to protect her “real person”, her family and her various roles in her life. Although lying entailed a degree of freedom in relation to her sense of morality, it was, at the same time, a decision judged and determined by the specificities and limitations of her social context and responsibility towards others.

By contrast, other women felt compelled to tell the truth to particular people to relieve

themselves from shame and feel more at ease with their choice. By telling the truth about her occupation to people at church, for example, Denise was working out her moral dislocation. Denise belonged to the *Igreja Universal*, that is, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. Besides praying for forgiveness and letting other people pray for her, telling the truth allowed her to fashion herself into an appropriate religious person, who she claimed was her “real person”. While talking about her friends at church, Denise emphasised the fact that these friends knew who she really was; a young Brazilian woman from Goiania who had initially migrated to London in order to earn enough money to construct a house for her parents. In her own judgment, her honest, repentant religious person was compatible with other peoples’ identities at church. Nevertheless, there were important contradictions in her life, as she could not possibly tell the truth about her occupation to other people beyond church.

Let me illustrate the conundrums that Denise found herself in as a result of lying and telling truth in different moments and in the context of different relationships. A few weeks after I met Denise, she invited me to her home which she thought was the safest place for us to talk. She lived with housemates and her boyfriend, who she described as people that were part of her “normal” life. I knocked on the door and two men greeted me. When I asked for Denise, they looked at me, surprised, and asked, ‘who are you looking for, Denise who?’ In that moment, I realised I had made a huge mistake as I was using her working name. I then tried Margot, thinking that her second name was probably her “real” name, but their reaction was the same. It suddenly dawned on me that I did not know her real name. Feeling nervous I apologised and said that maybe I had the wrong house number. Suddenly one of the men said, ‘the only Brazilian girl that lives here is Rita.’ Mortified by my mistake I replied, ‘Oh yes, Rita, I forgot her name, I am an English teacher but because I have so many students I am constantly forgetting their names’. At that moment, “Denise” phoned me to say that she was running late. I told her I was at her front door, but that I would wait for her on the corner of the street.

When Denise-Margot-Rita arrived, I was penitent and mortified, but did not have a chance to say anything as she ordered me to remain silent until, after entering the house, I was safely inside her room. Closing the door behind her, Denise sat on the floor next to me and asked me in whispers whether I had spoken to the blond guy (a Polish house mate). I replied yes, and she became visibly anxious, exclaiming ‘*nossa!*’ (Shit!). I explained to her that in order to rectify the mess I had unknowingly created, I had pretended that I was an English teacher meeting her for

the first class, and therefore confusing the names of my students. To calm her down, I said that they seemed quite convinced by my explanation, and had not asked any further questions. Denise then explained to me that she thought that the blond housemate was already suspicious, as he was always asking questions about her whereabouts. Worried that her boyfriend would find out about her real job, Denise told me she had to be cautious in hiding and lying about her working identity. Later, once she had relaxed in the space of her room, she told me how tiring it was to work in this occupation that required such a complicated administration of different characters which, at particular moments, collapsed into each other and complicated her ability to have a “normal” life. ‘I am so many different persons that sometimes I even get confused and do not know anymore who I am’ she said.

Besides the different names and identities that she kept as part of the job, and that she deployed in order to avoid her housemates’ knowledge of her profession, Denise was also trying to keep her work a secret from her boyfriend, Marcello. Marcello was oblivious to Denise’s occupation, but because they shared a room it was particularly complicated for her to hide it from him. She had to be careful about where to work in order to protect her secret. Therefore, Denise chose to work only at swing parties, instead of working full time in flats or brothels like Amanda and Sabrina did. Within sex work, women were sometimes able to choose their own niche, or move within the different niches that provided different incomes and/or protected their lifestyle. For Denise working at swing parties meant that she only had to work a few times a week, depending on the demand, and avoid more personal exchanges with clients.

Among other places, Denise worked at a flat in West London in one of the most exclusive areas in the city where swing parties took place four times a week throughout the day. Women working at this place usually earned £120 pounds for a swing party, which included a shift of four hours with several resting intervals. The parties were organised through the Internet and promoted different types of women for different days of the week. Swing parties were temporary places where women and clients moved back and forward engaging in semi-anonymous sexual exchanges. That is, women and clients interacted in a collective space where it was difficult to exchange anything more than sex, this sharply contrasts with the “emotional labour” that was required at brothels and private flats, as I will explain. Furthermore, swing parties had strict rules in order to prevent women from establishing further contact with clients. Women were under constant surveillance and were, for instance, required to leave their personal belongings

(phones) under lock during the party. Not only was the contact with clients to be avoided, friendships with other girls were also discouraged and women tended to maintain a distance from each other. Some women even talked about avoiding familiarity and intimacy with other girls in order to protect themselves from gossip which could affect their personal lives, as I have explained with Amanda's story. Overall, the anonymity of swing parties offered Denise a job that did not interfere with her personal normal life.⁷⁰

At first sight, we could say that women like Denise strategically chose to work at swing parties, as doing so allowed her to maintain the lie that helped her separate the working persona from the "real person". However it is important to explain at this point that women's choices were also partly constrained by the logic of the offer and demand for prostitutes in the sex market. During my fieldwork, women who had been working in the industry for more than fifteen years talked about the changes within the industry. They were concerned about the increase in the availability (mentioning the arrival of more migrant women willing to work in sex work), and the decrease in the demand (apart from the flooding of the market, the economic crisis of 2008 had affected the consumption of sex). Consequently, women were forced to sell their services at lower prices in order to compete in the market. As a result it was becoming more difficult to make ends meet. For this reason, women increased their working hours, if they could, at swing parties and combined them with other forms of sex work. It was due to the uncertainty of the market, I eventually realised, that some of my informants had no choice but to slowly move into full-time sex work (for example, working in brothels and eventually, for those who could afford it, in private flats). They did this in order to increase their income, raise their level of life in London and, for some, continue sending remittances back home. However, for Denise, swing parties offered the possibility to protect her identity as Marcello's girlfriend, hide and lie her working persona.

As far as Marcello knew, Denise was a baby sitter for a rich family in West London, as well as doing direct selling of "Avon products". Although it was true that she sold Avon products, she could not make enough money from her sales in order to live in London and send remittances back home. Both the sales person and the baby-sitting persona served as a facade to protect her identity as Marcello's girlfriend, hence her love ideals and plans for the future, 'No one really wants to be with a prostitute', she told me once. But nonetheless, prostitution as a temporary job

⁷⁰ For the exchange of information and managing biographical knowledge between sex workers see Day, 2007:67.

that offered the means she needed to maintain the remittances flowing to Brazil as well as her lifestyle in London. Besides lying to her boyfriend, Denise also lied to her family back in Brazil who did not know about her real occupation. Although, lying provoked a moral conflict that was in contradiction with her religious beliefs, it was a necessary choice and, more importantly, morally justified. By thinking about her role within her family and her family's beliefs (aspect that could be seen as judgment), Denise was convinced that by not telling her family about her life as a prostitute she was protecting her family from the stigma of prostitution. Through lying, she explained, she was caring for her family.

Like Denise, thirty-three-year-old Monica from Minas was required to lie in order to maintain the relationship with her new boyfriend who did not know about her job. After being a strip dancer for one year and having moved into prostitution only six months before, Monica met Tom at a pub in London. It was New Year's Eve and Monica was out with friends in London celebrating. As she explained to me, she did not even want to go out that night but was persuaded by her friends to join the party. At the bar Tom, a thirty-seven year-old English man asked her whether she wanted something to drink as an excuse to start a conversation with her. They talked for a while and exchanged phone numbers. Although she did not expect it, Tom called her and they eventually started dating. Monica only worked a few days a week as a prostitute in a flat, and therefore it was relatively easy for her to hide her working persona from Tom. Apart from sex work, she was also a masseuse trainee because she wanted to set up a beauty clinic with her sister in London, who was also a sex worker (as I already explained). Because of this, she used to explained to me that, 'It is not that I am completely lying as I really am studying and planning to set up a beauty clinic with my sister and Tom knows about this. I am just not telling the whole truth as he would never understand'.

Monica explained to me that the issue of her working as a prostitute was not really important as it was not what she wanted to do in the future and, more importantly, had nothing to do with who she really was. In this connection, Monica explained to me that Tom was dating the real Monica as he had met her "real person" rather than Cynthia (her working persona). This relationship, she explained, sharply contrasted with some of the failed relationships she had embarked on with clients at strip clubs. According to her, the failures of those relationships were due to the fact that she was Cynthia rather than Monica at the time when they first met and started the relationship. She mentioned that those relationships were already polluted by the

previous commercial exchange, hence they were founded on shaky ground. On this occasion, things were different. It was Monica who was falling in love with Tom, therefore she liked to think that she was not really lying: Tom knew Monica rather than Cynthia.

It is thus appropriate to mention at this point that, when women talked about their romantic relationships, they did not consider lying to their partners as cheating. This was because the love dimension of sex was separated from the work dimension. In their judgment of the situation it was best to keep the two aspects separated, even though lying and the potential disclosure of the truth might entail hurting their partners. Still, the revelation of the truth was never seen as a possibility, as the relationships with partners was understood and explained to me as completely different from relationships with clients. The intimacy that they developed with clients was part of the performance of “emotional labour”. It is true, however, that on some occasions relations with clients evolved into intimate emotional relationships and actual (rather than performed) care, as I will show later on. Nonetheless, generally speaking sex with clients was just work, whereas sex with partners involved an emotional bond that could not be faked, as different ethnographies in sex work have suggested (e.g., Zatz 1997, Brennan 2004, Day 2007, Kelly 2008). Having a partner who did not know about their occupation further complicated women’s lives. However, it was, for some indispensable to feel that they were able to have something real and meaningful in their lives. As Monica told me,

When I am at work with clients I am constantly acting, it is a continuous performance that you have to do in order to make clients happy, pay and make them want to come back again. With Tom, I chose to be myself, as I do not have to fake for money. When I am with him I feel that I am not betraying him or myself, as I can be what I really am. Being with him reminds me of who I really am and not who I have to be for the job.

Monica’s sense of real self was entirely attached to her person outside of work and to her role of the girlfriend. Tom represented a recuperation of Monica’s real self but moreover, a projection of her ideal future person who would eventually marry and have children.

In contrast with the women who struggled to separate their working lives from their personal lives, other women chose not to maintain such a strict partition. One of the reasons was the place they decided to work in. For instance, instead of working at swing parties or sporadically at flats, some women spent most of their working time at brothels or private flats.

This laid the basis for a merging of their real selves with their working personas. The logic of brothels and private flats meant that it was easy for punters to become regulars when they enjoyed the services of a particular prostitute. For these women emotional labour became a full time performance that demanded the exchange of sex for money and sometimes acts of intimacy and actual care. Women's preference in such circumstances involved the fashioning of a working persona that was also a caring one.

Life is work: the dangers and perks of blending life and work

Working as an independent prostitute involved a significant financial and personal investment. Women who worked independently were required to fund their own publicity, which included a professional portfolio of photographs for different advertisements and publicity, a monthly payment for the publication of their photos and the placing of contact information on websites that promoted independent escorts. These expenses were added to those of rent, bills, mobile, internet, in addition to the money they spent on their wardrobe, sex toys and lingerie. In spite of the costs, working independently was highly remunerated.

Women working in private flats were, however, more susceptible to becoming targets of abuse and violent attacks, because of the lack of security normally available in a brothel. They were vulnerable without the protection of pimps, madams, gatekeepers and co-workers who could intervene in the event of an unruly customer. To guard against such vulnerability, they sometimes worked together in private flats, although this meant they were breaking the law and hence ran the risk of prosecution or imprisonment. Women, who spent every day working in their flats, lived in a constant pantomime - that of being a prostitute - which affected their "real persons" as well as the way they related to clients, to family and other people. For such women, emotional labour became a full time performance that demanded the exchange of sex for money and further complicated exchanges, which sometimes turned into acts of reciprocity and intimacy.

'I am Brazilian, I am forty-three years old, I charge £80 pounds for half an hour and £150 for one hour. I provide French kissing, blowjob with condom, body massage, foot fetish, toys and a very good time together, I will take care of you baby.' These were the lines Sabrina repeated

every time she received a new phone call from a prospective client. Sabrina, like many prostitutes who were contacted by clients through the phone, claimed to have developed a special sensibility and could identify whether they were potentially dangerous or not. She claimed she could detect jeopardy from the caller's tone of voice, use of language and even the way they asked for a service or their reactions to the price (an aspect that has been analysed by Perkins and Lovejoy, 2007). Nevertheless, despite such powers, women working in private flats were constantly gambling their personal security every time they opened the door to a new client.

Sabrina was alone in her flat on the day when she was attacked by a client who wanted his money back after claiming to be unsatisfied with the service. After he beat her up and tried to sexually assault her, Sabrina managed to escape, opened the door of her flat and screamed for help, after which the attacker got scared and fled. She called me after the attack. It was late at night and she did not know what to do; she was feeling scared and completely vulnerable. It was the first time - mine and Sabrina's - that we were forced to face the crude reality of prostitution and its consequences. Sabrina's face was swollen and covered in bruises, she could not stop crying and was blaming herself for not having been able to see it coming, 'I was lucky until now, I have been gambling all this time Ana, and I thought I had been lucky because I am doing it for my family and not for myself, but I guess I was wrong, I am just a whore who can be attacked at any point by any of the strangers who cross my door'. As she told me, she felt wretched and also ashamed.

Because of her undocumented status, Sabrina did not know whether she should report the attack to the police. She did not want to run the risk of getting deported and of being discriminated and stigmatised by the police as well. Eventually, after much deliberation, Sabrina called the police to press charges, thinking that this was a way to protect other women from such attacks.⁷¹ The police opened an investigation, which six months later culminated in the seizing of the attacker, prosecution, trial and imprisonment. Even though Sabrina was wary about going to the trial and openly giving a statement about her profession - which she thought was going to be used against her - her case succeeded.

⁷¹ Organisations such as Open Doors report on their newsletter photographs or oral portraits of punters known of being violent as a way of warning prostitutes in the industry.

Despite the poignant story and gloomy picture that I have illustrated, working in private flats brought about benefits in addition to the economic ones. These concerned the establishment of longer-term relationships with regular clients. One particularity of private flats is that the services offered are multifaceted and give rise to relations of reciprocity. Taking cognisance of this, in what follows, I want to focus on such relationships that emerged from contacts with regular clients. The women involved did not want to maintain the strict divides that were normally required in the selling of sex. Instead they found themselves making a decision to care: one which they framed and justified in ethical terms.

Regular clients and the dilemmas of care

I am sitting on a white sofa talking to Sabrina, who has just said good-bye to one of her customers. She has changed into a fluffy pink robe that now covers her nudity, after having worn a tight white satin embodied corset that was requested by the client. We drink coffee as the London drizzle slowly pours down and the grey clouds cover the last sunrays of the day. Sabrina looks at me and smiles at a thought that has crossed her mind,

you know Ana, this client is a special one. He is one of my regulars, a very nice and well-educated man. I think he is in his mid-thirties, he is handsome and likes to be dominated in bed. Today, we spent quite a long time talking about his wife. He has not been married for long, but says that he does not share with his wife the sexual intimacy that he shares with me. He is afraid to ask to be dominated in bed. There I was, giving him advice on how to involve his wife in his private sexual desires. While spanking him for cheating on his wife, I told him the things he had to do tonight to satisfy himself and his wife. Then I told him, now you go back and tell your wife that a prostitute, a professional in terms of the heart, is helping you both. At the end, I asked him to give me a backrub, it was the least he could do in exchange for my emotional services.

For Sabrina, this client did not see himself as paying for sex in the normal way. As a regular client, he was more interested in the sexual and emotional intimacy that he had developed with her over the years. According to her, she functioned as a councilor who helped men and women achieve a better sexual life, moreover she thought of her relationship with this particular client as

a form of friendship, albeit, as she said, a very strange one.

At the heart of the question of sex work is the task of understanding the limits of emotional labour. Perhaps more clearly put, how does emotional labour look in sex work? My informants enjoyed describing to me the acting that they had to perform as part of their services. They all talked about the physical exhaustion that was involved in holding a fake smile, maintaining a sweet tone of voice and demonstrating attention to their clients. These displays of affection were “easily” performed with the regular hourly paid clients. However, it got complicated when some of them engaged in other services like the “girlfriend experience” or when they developed relationships with regular clients.⁷² Notwithstanding whether clients were regulars or not, as Bernstein has explained:

in contrast to the quick, impersonal “sexual release” associated with the street-level sex trade, much of the new variety of sexual labour resides in the provision of what I call “bounded authenticity” - the sale and purchase of authentic emotional and physical connection (2010:154).

Let me stress the difficulty in attempting to define the boundaries of emotional labour in sex work. Several studies on sex work and prostitution from different disciplines have provided evidence that suggests that clients do not necessarily only look for sex, and that women found themselves providing other type of services like affection, counseling or other forms of attention. Prince (1986) has discussed how women working for brothels in Nevada describe the wide range of emotional services that they offer to their clients; while Day (2007) explains how prostitutes in London develop long-term relationships with some of their clients. The same concerns are discussed in the ethnographic works of Kelly (2008) in Mexico; Brennan (2004) in the Dominican Republic and Bernstein (2007) who did fieldwork in San Francisco, Amsterdam and Stockholm. All of these ethnographies expose how the relationships between clients and prostitutes are further complicated by the purchase of not only sexual intercourse but care and the commodification of emotional intimacy.

Sex workers were not always willing to comply with these demands. Among my informants, it was often the case that women referred to some of their clients as “too chatty” and “needy” of attention. In such situations women commented that they felt more like

⁷² The girlfriend experience not only includes sex, but the performance of “being a girlfriend” for as long as the client has paid. Most of my informants talked about this experience as exhausting because of the emotional labour that it represented.

psychotherapists than prostitutes and that sometimes they would rather only have sex and move to the next client without having to listen or talk at all. But the logic of flats (brothels) and private flats invites punters to become regular clients. This turns a straightforward market transaction into something that bears more of a resemblance to dating, or romantic encounters between lovers. Consequently, regular clients could potentially become a burden by taking advantage of their personal connections and, as I will explain later in the next chapter, could bargain over the payment for sex. Therefore, it is worth analysing those extra skills that prostitutes sometimes performed with regular clients, as it provides evidence of the complexities and nuances of sex work. At the same time, analyzing these skills exposes sex workers' main predicament, that of being in an occupation that oscillates between being a market transaction, an intensive form of emotional labour, and a trigger for different forms of intimacy.

Monica, to whom I have previously referred, reserved one day a week for one of her most demanding regular clients who paid the cost of five hours of her time and services. According to Monica, her services alternated between sex, massage, listening to music, and conversation: the latter was predominant. They spent hours talking about their lives, he liked asking questions about Monica's life, her ideas for the future and plans. Monica usually described him as a good friend and mostly a nice and gentle man who needed company. At some point in one of our conversations Monica told me that one thing she had learned from being a prostitute was that sex was the least important thing you had for sale, 'Men want to pretend we are their lovers when they are with us' she said. Through recurrent contact he developed into someone she felt she cared for. While telling me the story, she explained to me how strange it was to accept that she actually liked some of the clients beyond the commercial exchange they were both part of. When I asked her why she found it strange, she told me that somehow she felt it was against what she should feel, as it was wrong. Prostitution was different from what she imagined. It was more complicated than she expected as she was selling more than sex, she was selling care and intimacy. Some of her clients were considered as friends, people she had fun with. However, because Monica had a romantic relationship with Tom, her encounters with regular clients did not develop into other type of relationships, as happened with other women.

For women like Sabrina, for instance, having regular clients was perceived (at the beginning) as advantageous, because there were fewer physical risks than with unknown clients. Sabrina's relationship with one of her regular clients Robert became an important friendship in

which more personal exchanges took place. Robert functioned in Sabrina's life as a boyfriend who helped her in her daily life, claimed to love her (at which Sabrina was incredulous) and offered her company. The relationship between Sabrina and Robert was based on the exchange of gifts, company and free sex, but more importantly it was based on Sabrina's choice to transfer their original commercial relation into a friendship relationship, a caring relationship. Sabrina made the conscious decision to develop a new kind of connection with Robert. By doing this, I argue, she was fashioning herself into a different person who was responding to a different type of relationship. She assumed new roles, other than that of the "prostitute". Their relationship looked like a girlfriend, boyfriend relationship as Robert was constantly attending to Sabrina's everyday needs. He bought groceries for her, they went on holidays and spent evenings together having dinner or watching television. For example, before Sabrina went back to Brazil Alex, her son, came to London to spend two weeks. During his visit, Robert acquired yet a further role in Sabrina's life. He was not the client but the friend who was introduced into the intimate domestic life of Sabrina; she was able to expose her role as mother, hence her "real person". She claimed she could only do this with Robert, as he was a friend, a close friend, someone she cared for despite the contradictions and moral conflicts that the initial contract underscored. Every time Sabrina referred to Robert, she talked about a good friend that helped her survive the difficulties of sex work; she cared for him beyond the provision of sex and money.

Women's choices to engage in further emotional intimate exchanges with clients emerged from their particularities of their relationships and personal moralities. While I would certainly not wish to claim that all sex workers experience these choices, it is certainly the case that some of my informants confronted by intermittent moral conundrums provoked by the commodification of intimacy, made certain decisions that helped them adapt themselves to the new situation. The possibility of developing an intimate caring relationship with a client by transferring the commercial relationship into idioms of relatedness eased the moral conundrums and stigma that sex work produced.

In their transference of idioms of relatedness to these relationships, women claimed to feel "normal". Their transition into a caring rather than transactive mode made them feel closer to their "real persons". Nonetheless, the situation provoked mixed feelings. On the one hand, women embraced this normality and intimacy because of the urge to locate – or self fashioning - themselves back into their real selves. However, on the other hand, the public idioms of morality

and the every day emotional labour was a constant reminder of the origins of the relationships. As Amanda put it 'these relationships are doomed to failure, they are already tainted by prostitution, they will always be fake'. Certainly the outcomes of the move towards normal emotional intimacy were never straightforward. These relationships were full of contradictions and tangled by further ambiguous exchanges, for example gifts.

The relationships between prostitutes and regular clients thus expose the complexities of selling and buying sex. Sex work, in any of its forms, includes different services that are located within the boundaries of what is normally understood as intimacy and care, but are sold as commodities. In other words, what is being exchanged is both, a product and an intimate social relationship between the seller and the buyer. Regardless of women's decisions of either rejecting further relationships with clients or developing close intimacies with them, the transactions uneasily combine different aspects. First, there is the emotional labour that is required for the supply of the product, second, there are the personal exchanges that occur within this transaction and finally, as Zelizer (2000) remarks, there are the consequences of the fact that different types of exchanges demand different types of economic transactions. This aspect will be further analysed in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The different stories that I have presented in this chapter offered a glimpse of the lives and moral dislocations experienced by Latin American sex workers. Women underwent a series of changes that were perceived as fundamental dislocations of their persons. As a result, sex workers worked out such dislocations and conundrums through self-fashioning practices. In this sense, self-fashioning was located in a particular socio-legal-cultural context: a specific moment within their personal life histories. Seeing ethics as fashioning particular kinds of personas in constant articulation with other kinds, allows us to ground the choices of these women within their understanding and judgment of their different roles and duties in their relationships to different people: it is, after all, an ethics grounded in relationships with others.

Furthermore, this chapter has explored the consequences that lying and caring had for the way women's persons were organised. Each kind of decisions appeared to pull in a contradictory

direction. On the one hand, women chose to lie as a way to separate their different persons and protect their real selves. Lying implicated moral conflicts, especially among those who were religious, but the moral anxieties were eased by thinking that their lies were ethical lies as they were done in the name of a form of caring. On the other hand, women actively ended up 'bringing the roles together', to some extent, by choosing to care. The choice of caring turned out to be more complex because it involved the recognition, and in a way the recuperation, of themselves and the other as moral persons. These choices were profoundly contradictory because although the women perceived sex work as an immoral activity, they undertook it to meet moral expectations – those entailed in kinship and other forms of relatedness.

This chapter and the previous one employed a close analysis to the complex nature of intimate labour. They revealed the intersection that exists between morality and ethical choices and the commodification of intimacy. Their moral conundrums and ethical choices cannot be understood without being situated within their relationships with other people. The ethical movement is one based on the relationship with what Levinas called "the other".⁷³ Levinas "gives us a compelling account of why others' needs, concerns and lives are something which makes claim on us and toward which we cannot be wholly indifferent" (Perpich 2008:126). My informants' ethical choices were guided by all those different "others" (for example, family for whom they felt responsible), and by those "others" they had to engage with on a daily basis as intimate labourers.

My quest for analysing intimate labour through an ethics lens emerged from women's narratives of labour and alienation and personal understanding of their new occupations. Self-fashioning practices emerged from the need to separate a pre-existing sense of self while fashioning a different person, a different temporary identity. Both domestic and sex workers as intimate labourers were required to perform, not only emotional labour, but roles that at times were closer to their previous gendered identities. These proved to be extremely complicated for both sex and domestic workers to handle. The cases that I have discussed in both chapters illustrate "...how often a central, primary, or salient feature of ethics is identified as keeping one's

⁷³ The other being the alterity, the diversity, the other that is not me, but that represents a relationship of responsibility (Levinas 1993:68).

For Levinas, "ethics concern for the being of the other than-one-self, non-indifference toward the death of the other, and hence, the possibility of dying for the other - a chance for holiness - would be the expansion of that ontological contraction that is expressed by the verb to be, dis-inter-estedness breaking the obstinacy of being, opening the order of the human, of grace and of sacrifice" (Levinas, 2000:202 [1998]).

world, following through on what one has committed to, finishing what one has begun, or at least acknowledging that one has changed direction” (Lambek 2010:27). Women’s ethical decisions were framed by a wider plan that connected their past lives and persons with their future projects.

Chapter Six

The bitter sweetness of the gift in the economy of intimate labour

We saw in the preceding chapter that sex workers developed a double life and person partly because of the stigma that prostitution conveyed and that the double life also became a strategy to protect their families and the people they cared for. Despite the efforts that women made to separate their personal life and their working life, there were some women who were not able to do it, or chose not to do it. This lack of boundaries led to the development of a particular intimacy with clients, especially with regular clients as I already explained. However, it is not only sex workers who experienced the conundrums of intimacy at work and the consequences of it. Domestic workers did so as well. For both, the occupations generated similar and complex anxieties at a personal, economic and social level. This chapter explores the ways in which employers and clients mitigated the tension of paying for care by giving gifts to the domestic workers that worked in their houses and to the sex workers they had sex with. It looks into the ways in which employers, clients and women workers re-embedded the relations that emerged from intimate labour through gift-exchanges and various non-monetary transactions.

Following Mauss anthropologists have been interested in gift-giving as a way in which enduring social relations are established and maintained (Laidlaw 2000:617). We could say that giving a gift entails the expectation of a return, in many cases the expectation of an equivalent return. Mauss, as Parry (1986) has suggested, stresses a combination of interest and disinterest, of freedom and constraint in the gift. For Parry, the understanding of “gift-exchange - in which persons and things, interest and disinterest are merged - has been fractured, leaving gifts opposed to exchange, persons opposed to things and interest to disinterest” (Parry 1986:458). Our western notions of an economically self-interested individual have affected the way in which we look at gift exchanges. We have a dichotomous view, which counterposes the gift as either a self-interested exchange or a disinterested “free” or “pure” gift. Recognizing this tendency to view things in either/or terms, this chapter takes into account gift-exchanges that move between the two extremes, often blurring the boundaries. On the one hand, I will refer to the gifts and commodities that were given to my informants partly to maintain social relations, and more

specifically to normalise already existing social relations. On the other hand, I will look at individuals' notions and understandings of whether a gift is given freely and disinterestedly or not. Such understandings come from my informants' perceptions and experiences of such exchanges.

Women in my research received gifts for different reasons and in very different contexts. The gift-exchanges developed from an on-going labour relationship that demanded and imposed different type of exchanges or services between the people involved. These exchanges emerged partly as a result of the intrinsic characteristics of the two occupations, in which the performance of emotional labour and intimacy were the commodities being purchased. On some occasions, the buying of these commodities generated further exchanges of care and emotional intimacy. As a result, such transactions provoked concerns on both parties, and resulted in unintended outcomes that were potentially problematic for the efficacy of the labour contract. Following this, I will argue that gifts (and/or commodities) functioned at different levels. First, they were a way to sort out the qualms generated from the proximity and intimacy with a stranger; second, they were a strategy to deal with the moral conundrums of the occupation (sex work in particular); third, they were a means to execute power and gain profit over the labour contract; and fourth, they were used to show genuine gratitude and affection.

In this chapter I explain the different relationships that were modified or negotiated as a result of the gift exchange, and the consequences of such exchanges. My exploration of the gift departs from the analysis of exchanges done within particular labour relations. The gift-exchanges were generated from a straightforward commercial transaction, which influenced how women workers felt about the obligation - or lack of obligation - to reciprocate, as some of them assumed that the exchanges were part of the payment. There were different meanings, consequences and perceptions of whether a given object should be understood as a gift, a pure gift or just an object whose significance derived from the social context and the social relationships in which they were exchanged.

Giving and receiving are not merely Durkheimian (or Kantian) moral *obligations*, but the active and formalised fulfillment of those obligations. Hence they are simultaneously *acts*, embedded in a cycle of the production and cancellation of particular personal, interpersonal, and collective states and reestablishing the criteria through which persons and relationships are constituted and evaluated and the world renewed (Lambek 2010:18).

As Mauss has stated, it is important to deal with the nature of the object given and at the same time, with the relationship between giver and recipient (1990:8-14). Following his lead, I refer to the nature of the objects exchanged, the relationships between giver and recipient, the characteristics of the exchange marked by the object and by personal intentions and the context in which these transactions take place.

Exchanges of intimacy and gifts: relationships with regular clients

Having explained the relationship between Sabrina and Robert in the previous chapter, I want to emphasise the aspects of the relationship that were sustained or affected by the presence of gifts. After the problem that Sabrina had with the police (Chapter Two) Robert decided to help her by signing the tenancy agreement of the new flat where Sabrina installed her business. Later on during fieldwork, I realised that Robert had signed the agreement besides paying the rent and the bills of the flat where Sabrina worked for one year. Every time I was at Sabrina's place, Robert would call and asked if he could come to visit in case she needed groceries, cigarettes or any other thing. After a few months of going to Sabrina's, I started recognising when Robert was the person calling as her voice changed into a sweet but relaxed tone of voice, in contrast to the fake tone she used with other clients. 'Hello my love, how are you? How was your day? [the conversation would continue]. Yes, precious, you can come, of course, you can come anytime you want, you know that, you are my delicious' she would tell Robert over the phone. On one occasion I asked her if she saw Robert every time he wanted, to which she replied, 'Yes, Ana, I have to, he pays the rent of the place, this is basically his flat. I owe him so much, so if he wants to come I let him'. Even though she did not fancy Robert and made fun of the fact that he was '*não muito gostoso*' (not very attractive), she accepted his constant visits to the flat. She thought of him as a decent man, yet knew and told me on several occasions, '*ay amiga, nada é grátis*' (oh my friend, nothing is for free).

Sabrina reciprocated Robert's amiable and caring gestures, as well as his constant gifts, with the development and prolongation of an intimate relationship based on feelings of care. Sabrina always said that Robert was mostly looking for company, because they would rarely have

sex; he just wanted to be around. The relationship that Sabrina had with Robert, in contrast to the normal run of the mill clients, did not necessarily imply the supply of sex every time they met. However when Sabrina did provide sex, although it was not paid for with cash, it was “paid for” in other forms, for example with gifts.

Robert cared for Sabrina, as he told me several times, and wanted to help her achieving her financial goals. Sabrina cared for Robert and saw him as a friend who helped her when she most needed it. Yet, the further exchanges in which they both engaged demanded relations of reciprocity and further debts. Although Robert did not control Sabrina’s working life and finances, in exchange for his help and gifts he demanded time with her. Time was something that she did not have, as she worked from eight to ten hours a day, seven days a week. The fact that she dedicated most of her days off (which were very few), to Robert, given that time was meaningful to her, was a sign of her willingness to engage in reciprocity and to maintain the bond between them. They visited different places in London, went to the movies and sometimes even travelled together around the country during weekends.

For example, on one occasion we went on a day trip to Stratford-upon-Avon as Sabrina wanted to go to Shakespeare’s birthplace before going back to Brazil. Sabrina treated Robert kindly and always made comments on how a decent and caring man he was, she would hold his hand, kiss him and perfectly performed the role of the girlfriend. Although she was not fluent in English, she managed to communicate with Robert. We spent the whole day in Stratford-upon-Avon, walked along the river, went to the tourist sites and had lunch at a pub where Sabrina wanted to eat. Just before we entered to the pub she told me in Portuguese, ‘Ana we are not paying for anything, Robert is going to pay for everything. We will not spend a penny on this trip’. That is exactly what happened, and the pattern was repeated every time I went out with the two of them. Sabrina was fully aware of her debt to Robert and, even though their relationship resembled a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship that moved beyond the commercial contract, she always made sure that she would obtain something from him that represented a type of payment for her time. She mentioned on several occasions that she could not go out with him without obtaining something from him. This she admitted conflicted her. Sabrina respected and had embraced the social identity of the girlfriend in her relationship with Robert, but she still believed that a relationship between a client and a prostitute would always be tainted.

The presence of gifts or other forms of payments within relationships with regular clients

was a constant feature in the working lives of my informants. Like Sabrina, Vanessa developed intimate and emotional relationships with clients that were complicated by the exchange of gifts and the consequences of these exchanges. After a month of not seeing Vanessa because she was working twelve hours a day in a flat in an upper-class neighbourhood of London which was run by a Venezuelan madam, I received a phone call from her saying that she had some news to tell me. As mentioned earlier, Vanessa came to London with the excuse of wanting to study English.⁷⁴ She came in search of new experiences and love and with the dream to find a husband and construct a family. Like many of the women I have presented in this thesis, Vanessa started working as a cleaner and slowly moved into sex work. After working as a stripper for a few months, Vanessa was employed by a madam who administered a flat in a high-class neighbourhood of London. After she had worked at the flat for three months, two of Vanessa's clients, Giorgio and Mark, turned into regular clients requesting her services exclusively. Giorgio was young, he was single and had come from Europe in pursuit of new experiences. By contrast, Mark was older and was married. Most clients enjoyed or seemed to enjoy talking as part of the service, but Mark gave the impression of being genuinely interested in Vanessa's life. Through his regular visits and with the beginning of different exchanges, he was becoming something more than, or different to, other clients, according to her.

For the next two months Mark continued visiting Vanessa two or three times a week; every new visit included a new gift. Vanessa described him as amiable, decent and with a posh accent - 'I think he is really rich Ana, he is always bringing me gifts' - she added while her eyes literally sparkled with the thought of it. The gift exchange started with a fine bag, a leather jacket, tall leather boots and the usual sexy lingerie which was a frequent gift given to most of the sex workers. Vanessa perceived these gifts as tips and tokens of appreciation for the services and the emotional labour she was providing. Nonetheless, the presence of gifts and the continuous contact that they established were bringing Mark closer, on a personal level, to Vanessa. As the contact became more intimate and familiar, their relationship was transferred to settings outside the working space. The activities that they started sharing in public resembled of those activities that are shared by any other couple; such as going out for dinner, sharing lunch or a film. At this point Mark was purchasing more than sex, he was buying intimacy and at the same time was

⁷⁴ As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Vanessa came to London with a student visa in order to learn English. After working as a cleaner for a while she moved into the sex work industry in order to make more money and be able to meet a potential future partner.

making efforts to normalise the relationship with Vanessa. The exchanges that commenced between the two of them started shifting their commercial relationship into a friend-like, boyfriend/girlfriend type of relationship. While many women made the conscious decision to avoid relationships with regular clients, Vanessa did not want to maintain the strict divide between the working person and her real person. There was still something transactive that underlay this, however: she believed that she could use these relationships to her advantage.

Parallel to her relation with Mark, Vanessa started making the acquaintance of another regular client who, in many respects, was the opposite of Mark. First of all, Giorgio spoke Spanish, something that immediately made a difference to Vanessa as she spoke very little English. She described him as fun, young, interesting and more importantly open minded about the fact that she was a prostitute. Like Vanessa's relationship with Mark, her relationship with Giorgio was evolving into something occurring on an intimate level that surpassed the working place and the initial commercial exchange. In a few months, their relationship evolved into a "normal relationship" in which Vanessa no longer charged for sex. She started developing feelings for Giorgio, as she told me. The shift in the relationship was expressed in exchanges beyond sex, for example the exchange of personal information. As Zelizer has stated, "Caring relationships also qualify as intimate to the degree that they involve trust: they entrust at least one of the parties with information about, or attention to, another party that is not widely available and that would be damaging if offered to third parties" (Zelizer, 2005:162). Vanessa's secret identity of being a prostitute was safely kept with Giorgio. In particular, her relationship with Giorgio became more intimate the moment he knew Vanessa wanted to stay in the UK but was not permitted to do so because she lacked the proper visa. Her student visa would soon expire therefore Vanessa needed to find someone to marry her, as it was the "easiest way" for her to be able to stay in London legally. Giorgio, who fitted what Vanessa needed, offered to marry her for £5,000 as a way to "help" her.

The transaction however was not as straightforward as it appears. What complicated the issue was that the money to pay for the marriage was offered by Mark. Although he was unable to marry her (because of being already married), Mark wanted Vanessa to stay in London and become his mistress. In this complex set of intimate relationships, where the purchase of emotional intimacy was at stake, Mark had the money to pay for a fake marriage, while Giorgio was willing to play the role of the fake husband. Consequently, both relationships demanded

from Vanessa that she fashion new social identities: ones that would correlate with the new relationships she had developed with both men. The two relationships then entailed different rights and duties, and different types of exchanges, payments and debts. This initiated a series of complicated economic and emotional exchanges between Vanessa, Mark and Giorgio. For instance, apart from the £5,000 for the marriage, Mark provided Vanessa with a flat where she lived with Giorgio before marrying him in order to fulfill the marriage requisites for the Home Office. In exchange, Mark demanded “fidelity” from Vanessa, which implied not seeing other clients. Giorgio on the other hand was prepared to countenance her meeting with Mark and other mature rich clients, but requested her to stop seeing younger clients, who he perceived as more sexually threatening than the “sugar daddies”.

Although the situation and the relationships that Vanessa developed with the two clients generated a complicated set of transactions, both economic and emotional, she was able to use her job and what the flat offered to her own advantage. With the help of Mark, who asserted that he was in love with Vanessa, she managed to pay for a husband, hence getting the visa she wanted, and also was living in a flat paid for by her now “sugar daddy” Mark, and sporadically (and secretly) received other clients. Vanessa then moved to the flat Mark had rented, in an upper class area of London, and started living a new and different life - of the mistress or “kept woman” of a “sugar daddy” (as such men were widely known by sex workers). The question here is, were Mark and Giorgio maximising their profits with their gifts, or was Vanessa maximising her benefit with the exchange?

The answer is not straightforward as we would expect, as the three were variously maximising their investments, in different ways, with the series of exchanges that they commenced. The different forms of payments between Vanessa and the two men signified “differences in the character of those social relations currently operating” (Zelizer 2000:826). On the one hand, Mark’s gifts appeared as a strategy to purchase intimacy as well as sex, hence the possibility for Mark to make claims about the relationship. While in the meantime Giorgio, became someone who alongside his resemblance to a pimp - as he frequently promoted her services with adverts in local newspapers or the internet in order to find more ‘*viejos ricos*’ (old rich men) to exploit –he also benefited from the arrangement as he was financially supported by Mark. On the other hand, Vanessa looked set to acquire her residence permit, was in a “relationship” with Giorgio and had a working place/home for “free” in London. However, it is

important to mention that her relationships with both clients brought with them a series of debts that became, at some point, quite difficult for her to pay. Not only was Vanessa enmeshed in the continuous performance of emotional labour with both men at particular moments, but she was also developing feelings of care and love, particularly for Giorgio, whom she thought of as a potential boyfriend and a “real husband”. Vanessa talked about her relationship in terms of love and desired to make this “fake” relationship work out, as long as she could. We could argue that she was deceiving herself by making this choice. However, I suspect that it was more complicated than this, as I think that this choice also emerged from Vanessa’s desires regarding her future; a future in which she would become a wife of a caring man with children living in London. By choosing to care in her intimate relationship with Giorgio, Vanessa was temporarily recuperating her real person while at the same time fashioning her ideal character in a long term. I argue that this choice was initially made as a result of the emotional intimacy and care that emerged within sex work.

The complicated three-way relationship in which she was entangled, as well as fuelling her hopes and expectations for the future, also became an on-going source of debt repayable in that future, and hence uneasiness about it. Vanessa’s legal status in London was in the hands of Giorgio, while her financial security was controlled by Mark, who could withdraw his “help” and gifts any time he wanted to. In both lives she was required to play different roles according to the different men, the different exchanges and debts. She became the future wife of Giorgio (who was also her pimp) and the lover of Mark (who was also her sugar daddy) and in the meantime she played the role of the whore with other men (who were more straightforwardly her clients). As Sophie Day states: “Varied roles and relationships between sex workers and regular customers could dissolve the difference between commercial and non-commercial relationships to produce a virtually seamless web of artifice” (2007:188). The relationship between Vanessa and Mark was a situation in which a “normal” relationship was aimed at by changing his role from that of a casual client to a regular one and then to a lover/sugar daddy. By giving gifts and sponsoring Vanessa’s husband, Mark re-embedded the commercial relation that he had with Vanessa and gave some meaning to the transaction.

As I will demonstrate below, the relationships that Vanessa and Sabrina maintained with Mark, Giorgio and Robert respectively were defined by the financial transactions or time investment and by the materiality of the gifts exchanged and different forms of care. In other

words, both women received different types of gifts according to the different types of expectations and demands of their clients, and consequently felt obliged to reciprocate in a variety of ways.

Different types of gifts

Robert's gifts to Sabrina were family-oriented, resembling those typically given to a long-term partner. As an illustration, before Sabrina went back to Brazil in December 2010 Robert bought several gifts for Alex, Sabrina's son. Games for the Nintendo XL and a Nike jacket that Robert knew Alex wanted were objects that, given that they were intended for the most important person in Sabrina's life, encompassed a very different meaning for her. Sabrina told me that she was deeply touched by Robert's gesture towards her son, despite the fact that Robert had only met him once. Aside from the gifts that Robert bought for Alex, he actively participated in Sabrina's preparation to go back home and took charge of the operation, helping her to arrange everything she needed. Moreover, gift-exchanges between them went beyond the provision of material goods and the provision of services: he ran errands, fixed things in the flat, and performed other domestic chores.

By contrast, the gifts that Mark gave to Vanessa resembled those given by a lover to his mistress. Apart from the rent and clothes, Mark gave Vanessa flowers, expensive clothing, designer bags, shoes, chocolates and expensive lingerie and sex toys for her to use with him (as a counter-gift). These gifts were the sort of clichéd gifts that a man would give to his mistress. These gift transactions entailed a particular temporality, that of the gift and the counter-gift, necessary in the negotiation and permanence of the relationship. As Bourdieu states, the temporality of the gift exchange has a lot to do with a question of style "which means in this case timing and choice of occasion, for the same act – giving, giving in return, offering one's services, paying a visit, etc. – can have completely different meanings at different times" (Bourdieu, 1977:6). There is a necessary manipulation of time in the exchange of gifts in which the agents involved recognise the logic of the exchange. Vanessa knew how to play with time and how to reciprocate the gifts that Mark gave. For example, although there were occasions when Vanessa did not want to see Mark because it limited her time to see other clients - which was being kept

from him as a secret - she knew that at least once a week she had his entire attention, and he hers. At these times, she was able to ask for things she wanted or needed, but in order to gain those benefits she was required to perform a particular emotional labour and play out the fantasy of sharing an emotional intimacy with Mark. Though it might appear that these gifts were purely functional and utilitarian commodities that were exchanged between the two of them in order to gain benefits, some of these gifts became personal through time.

In November 2010, I attended the counterfeit marriage of Vanessa and Giorgio, and a few weeks before “the wedding” I participated in the enterprise of buying a wedding dress for Vanessa with Mark’s money. Initially I thought that Vanessa would buy a normal party dress for the wedding, as we were not shopping at bridal shops. Still, as the day progressed Vanessa started showing excitement about buying a bridal white dress. Although she knew the wedding was a pretence, she was excited about the idea of dressing as a bride and playing the role of the bride during the ceremony. In addition to the bridal dress, Mark bought the wedding ring that Giorgio was supposed to put on Vanessa’s finger during the wedding ceremony. The ring was engraved with the words ‘I love you forever, Mark’. Sarcastically, Mark liked to joke about the fact that as he was paying for the whole thing - including the groom - he was practically the husband, therefore he wanted to be present on Vanessa’s finger. However, the ring represented a problematic gift for Vanessa; it was “charged” with Mark’s person. She felt that the ring contained a part of Mark and more specifically the relationship between them. She told me that she could not wear this ring while she was with Giorgio because it would be like carrying Mark with her all the time; it was wrong. At the same time, she mentioned feeling conflicted by the fact that she could not sell it or give it back to Mark as it was such a personal object. ‘Wearing the ring is like being attached to Mark beyond our relationship, I cannot do that’ she told me. In contrast with other commodities that Mark had given her, this ring was a symbol of their intimate relationship beyond the commercial exchange; an exchange that Vanessa was not willing to sustain forever.

Besides the problematic character of the ring, the marriage was in other respects the ultimate gift; it represented a good example of the transcendence of the labour contract and the engagement in emotional intimate relations with clients. Furthermore, Vanessa’s wedding represented alternative forms of exchange that played a complex part in the constitution of her persona – sometimes double, sometimes merged - as a migrant prostitute in London.

The wedding was a performance in which it was difficult to separate the different layers of

the multiple characters and lies that Vanessa had created as part of the London/sex worker biography. Guests who knew the truth, like me and our friend in common Barbara, became part of the functional lie. Through this performance, Vanessa and Giorgio were fulfilling a new social identity, that of husband and wife in the eyes of family and friends. To confuse things a little bit more, during the party she introduced her new husband to her parents, through a web camera. Vanessa's parents were thrilled about the fact that she had found someone, that she would no longer need to struggle with her student visa, and she would no longer be alone in a foreign country.⁷⁵ Lying to her family was a necessary condition to preserve her role as a daughter. She could not tell the truth about her life in London as it would, as she put it, "destroy her father". Lying, as I have presented in the previous chapter, followed the logic of protecting her real person from stigma, her status in the eyes of her parents and her identity as a good daughter who cared for her parents.

Given that many of my informants were undocumented migrants in the UK or, like Vanessa, held a temporary student visa, they were in a more vulnerable position than other sex workers in London. This is an aspect that must be taken into account when analysing women's choices about the reciprocating of gift exchanges with clients. On the one hand, I have suggested that women made personal ethical choices to care whenever they felt comfortable with the emotional intimacy that arose within the occupation. On the other hand, gift exchanges either reinforce such intimacy or annul every possibility for its production.

Not all gift exchanges and contact with regular clients evolved in the same way and produced the same outcomes; it was women's and clients' decisions, skills and calculations that sustained a prolonged intimacy between them.⁷⁶ In what follows, I will analyse those cases in which women were not able to sustain commercial functional arrangements or friendships in the presence of gifts and intimacy, and explore the consequences of these types of arrangements in women's working and private lives.

⁷⁵ They were expecting to meet their son-in-law soon back in Colombia, something which was to happen as soon as Vanessa got her visa entitling her to remain in the UK, six months later.

⁷⁶ Although I have been stressing women's choices, because they were my informants, clients' reasons contributed to the development and maintenance of the relationships. Unfortunately I cannot account for those reasons.

Bargaining with gifts

As Vanessa and Sabrina's stories demonstrated, having regular clients provided women with a minimum guaranteed income, clients were perceived (at the beginning) as a good investment, although they could also cause trouble and could potentially become a burden the moment they wanted to cross the line and start bargaining over the payment of sex. This is illustrated by the story of Angelica, a Brazilian sex worker who, like many of the women in my research, switched from domestic to sex work in order to increase her income.⁷⁷ By the time we met she was working in swing parties and sporadically in some flats where there were strict rules about establishing further contact with clients outside the working place, therefore it was difficult for her to have a regular source of income beyond the swing parties. Yet, in spite of the difficulties, Angelica often managed to get hold of information such as clients' mobile numbers during her work. This was the first step to seeing them outside the ambience of the swing parties, and arranging private meetings from which she was able to keep all the money to herself. Doing this, generally speaking, was considered as a good business move.

Whenever Angelica contacted or was contacted by clients from the swing parties she would initially set up a clear negotiation, which included the price, the place and the rules of the service that she was providing. The initial encounters with some clients, who eventually become regular, ran smoothly in an ambience of a well synchronised commercial transaction. Money was exchanged for the services she provided. Yet, when casual clients started evolving into regular ones, the exchange of gifts commenced. These were mainly inexpensive gifts, such as flowers, wine, clothes, and dinner invitations. However, in contrast with Vanessa and Sabrina, the presence of gifts in Angelica's relations with clients and the increase in personal contact, slowly erased the presence of other forms of payment, for example cash. In other words, gifts eventually replaced the commercial exchange. Even when she was spending time with them by going out for dinner, drinks and to watch films - and on some occasions providing sex, it was rare that Angelica charged for her services. The provision of sex, according to her, was the way she reciprocated for the company, the gifts and the invitations. The more she saw clients the closer and more personal

⁷⁷ As mentioned in Chapter Two, thirty-two-year-old Angelica migrated to the UK in 2005 leaving behind her daughter in Brazil.

she felt towards them. After a while of seeing them outside the work ambience Angelica started to think of them in terms of friendship. As she told me on several occasions, she was having a good time with them and enjoyed their company.

It is not the case that the women who worked in the sex industry were unable to develop friendships or important relationships with clients. Vanessa and Sabrina's stories show the opposite. Nonetheless, the relationship with regular clients, as Sabrina stated, were already tinted by the stigma of prostitution hence were restricted by the ambience of the commercial transaction. Angelica, however, thought that the sex contract could be surmounted by friendship and replaced by the development of an intimate relationship. Consequently, in the absence of a commercial exchange and a clear negotiation with clients, she ended up giving sex for free without receiving anything back except for a few gifts and invitations. This arrangement owed much to her personality and rather chaotic approach to personal finance, but also to her personal investments in relationships: a situation which was complicated by her recognition that asking for money, beyond a certain point, would be "complicated". Once clients became regular and were perceived as "boyfriends" or "friends" she expected them to behave not as clients any more, and even felt unable to return to whatever commercial dimension had previously existed. By assuming the role of the friend, Angelica expected that clients would modify their social identity within the new relationship. This would convey the acquisition of new rights and responsibilities. But when she expected that the new friends would actually assume these further responsibilities she found herself trapped in the social identity of the prostitute, and when at times of need she requested help, the so-called friends failed to step up to the mark.

From a utilitarian point of view, we could say that these clients were individuals maximising their investment as they were saving money by starting a different exchange with Angelica, while still obtaining sex. Once the commercial contract was surpassed, clients and prostitutes found ways to deal with the further social, emotional and moral implications of the purchase of intimacy and re-embed the relationships in different ways. However, when the presence of gifts or other forms of payment ceased, causing the relationship to revert to its original contract - that is the payment of cash for sex - this resulted in the termination of the relationship. In Angelica's case, when asking for help did not work, she tried to go back to the original deal by charging for sex, which unsurprisingly shocked and offended the clients. They no were longer willing to pay for sex and eventually vanished. In her view, the clients who had

become amiable, decent, caring and somehow emotionally close to her, ended up being completely despicable and vile. She was left with a sense of betrayal.

In the presence of gifts and emotional intimacy, cash usually vanished or was replaced by commodities and kin-like relations, as the stories of Vanessa, Sabrina and Angelica demonstrated. Thus, Sabrina and Vanessa did manage to maintain a permanent exchange of gifts and counter-gifts with their clients, which provided them with financial security. Both got money out of the relation even though they stopped receiving cash in exchange for their services. Gifts were transformed into the money they were not receiving. Therefore money acquired a different meaning that depended on the person involved in the transaction. It was clear that, as Bloch and Parry suggest, “while the gift of a specific object always ‘retains an element of the person who gave it’, exchange relationships tend to be ‘more completely dissolved and more radically terminated by the payment of money...’” (1989:5). The exchange of cash that these women maintained with their clients dissolved further possibilities of an intimate relationship, while in the presence of gifts and - I would like to add - the investment of time and emotional intimacy, money acquired a different, more personalised form. Sabrina and Vanessa maintained a constant flow of money, either in cash or gifts, which helped them to keep a level of control. In contrast, the gifts that Angelica received - and the lack of control over the counter-gift on her part - affected the commercial transaction and her bargaining power. At the end of the transaction she was left with no gifts, no cash and no friends.

The sweetness of cash

So far I have presented stories of women who engaged in further exchanges with regular clients beyond the commercial contract. In the following section I discuss cases in which women chose not to develop emotional intimacy with clients, even in the presence of gifts. As I already mentioned, some regular clients could become what women referred to as “sugar daddies”; that is, a mature man who financially supported, in this case, a prostitute in exchange for different type of services. Whenever Vanessa’s friends in the sex work business referred to Vanessa’s relation with Mark, they talked about him as the perfect sugar daddy.

Taking a contrasting approach to what constitutes such “perfection” was Sally, a Colombian sex worker who accumulated a few experiences with sugar daddies during her time in London. She explained to me that the sugar daddy evolves from the relation that women might establish with regular clients, yet not all regular clients become sugar daddies. ‘Apart from the possibility of getting the bills paid, you can always get all sorts of gifts such as: plane tickets, jewels, clothes, expensive shoes, expensive bags, manicures, lingerie, anything really’, she told me. Yet, sugar daddies according to Sally must be kept at a “safe distance”, which meant not getting emotionally involved with them. They were expecting, as part of the exchange, a girlfriend; ‘I am not the type of girl who can do the girlfriend experience all the time, it is exhausting’, specifically with sugar daddies or regular clients, Sally expressed.

Sugar daddies, like other types of regular clients, could function as a form of insurance, although Sally affirmed that it was necessary to learn how to prevent them from taking too many liberties. I then asked Sally how she managed to draw the boundaries, her answer was with the presence of some form of cash. She never slept with any sugar daddy or regular client without having cash in hand first. It did not matter if she received gifts from them, business was business and if they wanted sex they needed to understand that sex was what she sold. For her the constant presence and flow of cash maintained the commercial contract – and hence the boundaries - between them. By saying this I am not trying to simplify the complexity of the commercial transaction of sex and pretend that it is as impersonal as any other transaction characteristic of the market. We must take into account that the intrinsic nature of sex work complicates the anonymity in the exchange of money as Bloch and Parry suggest (1989:6). As Zelizer has stated, “money as compensation (direct exchange) implies an equal exchange of values, and a certain distance, contingency, bargaining, and accountability between the parties” however, “money as gift implies intimacy and/or inequality plus a certain arbitrariness” (2000:817). Yet, in spite of the intimate transactions within sex work, the presence of money as compensation helped Sally to maintain the boundaries necessary for the performance of the job and retain control and autonomy over her life and emotions.

Although the sugar daddy was a sweet temptation, not all of the women I met desired one. At some point, however, I noticed that the majority of them nourished the fantasy of meeting a kind of rich “prince charming” who would solve many of their problems. This thought, however, was mainly kept as a fantasy as soon as they were drawn back to the reality of dealing with their

every day contact with clients. For women like Amanda, for example, clients were men looking for experiences that they were not able to request from their sexual partners in bed. Furthermore, besides sex, she affirmed that men were looking for intimacy and made efforts to pretend that she was something more than a prostitute. She mentioned that they tried to create proximity or familiarity through the sharing of personal information and, among other things, by giving gifts. While talking about the exchange of gifts with clients, Amanda told me that she was against receiving any type of gifts from clients if these did not come with the cash that she was expecting for her work. She would not provide any extra time, sex, massage or blow-job for a bottle of champagne or dinner.

In *The Gift*, Mauss argued that to refuse to give, just as to refuse to accept was tantamount to declaring war; “it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality” (1990:13). In this regard, Amanda rejected the idea of having a sugar daddy, nor did she let regular clients forget that she sold sex, pleasure, fantasies and whatever they wanted. Her services had a price. She wanted to maintain her social identity of the prostitute very clear in terms of the roles she was required to play. She always mentioned that she was not a good actress and that she could not pretend for too long that she actually cared for clients. She was able to perform emotional labour and act only while she was working, rather than keeping up a performance as Vanessa and Sabrina were sometimes required to do when they were with Mark, Giorgio and Robert.

In contrast with other informants Amanda, as I have explained in the previous chapter, thought of prostitution as morally wrong, therefore she never saw herself establishing relationships with clients. Furthermore, while in London she maintained a long distance relationship with her boyfriend Ronaldo back in Brazil, who was unaware of her job. Although she withheld such details from Ronaldo, she held her relationship with him as a model of emotional intimacy and assured me that she would never get the type of relationship that she had with him from any client. Moreover, she cynically stated that men who used the services of prostitutes were not really looking for a girlfriend, ‘we are only whores (*somos putas*) to them, they already have their girlfriends or wives waiting for them at home after they have fucked us’ she said. ‘When they give you gifts all they want really is a free ride, it is not that they really care about you. They think that by giving you a gift you will start giving them sex for free. I am not here to have a relationship, it is not possible to have a real relationship with a client’ she told me.

However, it was never that clear-cut as she sometimes did receive gifts from regular clients. Furthermore, she admitted that over the two years she had been in London working in the sex industry she developed personal bonds with some clients, with the caveat that they always gave cash as well. Regular clients willing to pay the price without taking advantage of the familiarity with sex workers were ideal; with those clients Amanda did not have to pretend that she cared. Paradoxically, at some level, it was for them that she genuinely had some respect and for them that she "cared " in a different way. The relationships that Amanda established with her regular clients were always kept within the margins and limits of the labour contract. She was exchanging sex for money. The empathy, comfort and care came as a result of time and the success of the commercial contract.

The different stories that I have presented so far uncovered the discrepancies and convolutions that originated from the development of intimacy through gifts exchanges with regular clients. This set of negotiations and discontinuities not only provoked unintended outcomes (such as emotional intimacy and actual care) but further problematised the original economic transaction. On the one hand, for example, Vanessa learned to efficiently manage and withstand the commodification of intimacy of the sexual contract in her everyday work; whereas, on the other, she was conflicted by the emotional aspects of such commodification, as well as by the different social identities she acquired in her relationships with Mark and Giorgio. As a result of the gift transactions, Vanessa and Sabrina felt a moral obligation to reciprocate although, at different points in their relationships, they knew they were not going to be able to 'pay back'. Henceforth, they found themselves involved in long-term relationships that they would not have sustained otherwise. Relationships with regular clients reveal the ambiguities that were generated as a result of the continuous shared intimacy and emotional labour. The ambiguities emerged from the fact that these kin-like relations occurred within market-based forms of labour and unwritten contracts, which at the same time left spaces for negotiation and possibilities to reformulate, either different types of relationships and intimacy, or more efficient commercial exchanges.

Gifts in the realm of domestic work

So far I have presented the cases in which sex workers, in the presence of gifts, negotiated and worked out the ambiguities of the exchanges that they established with regular clients. In what follows, I will focus on the cases of domestic workers who engaged in similar exchanges and relationships with employers. Although the labour relations developed on the basis of a radically different form of services, the exchanges between worker and employer resulted in similar ambiguities in regard to the intimacy developed and in regard to the labour contract.

As I already explained in Chapter Three, the domestic workers in my research worked as housecleaners, live-in and live-out domestic workers. Such types of work entailed quite different logics in terms of wages, freedom, contact with employers, emotional labour and intimacy. Live-in domestic workers worked in close proximity to their employers, which generated, on the one hand, conflict and diverse forms of control and surveillance, and on the other hand, meaningful relationships and feelings of care. For other domestic workers the development of emotional intimacy that sometimes evolved from the labour relation originated, not necessarily from physical intimacy, as most often they worked alone, but from meaningful personal exchanges that developed with time.

Even though sex and domestic work have a different dynamic, they both entail intimate labour embedded in the logic of care. For both, sex and domestic workers, the idiom of care was an intrinsic part of their daily work. Working in the intimate space of someone else's family conveyed an obligation to interact with strangers on a temporary or more permanent basis. Therefore, hiring a strange woman to come to your home to clean, feed and take care of your children provoked a series of anxieties, ambiguities as well as ethical choices at different levels, as I have mentioned in Chapter Four. In what follows, I will focus on the gift exchanges between employers and workers as strategies to negotiate the labour relation. On the one hand, the exchange of gifts mediated the conflicts that arose as a result of the continuous contact between employer and employee. On the other hand, the gifts functioned as a resource to create the intimacy that the work sometimes did not provide but was intrinsic to the occupation.

Gifts in the realm of domestic work held a particularity that came from the "familiarity"

that the work entailed and from the understanding of the relationships between employer and employee. The things that were given as gifts resembled those things that are often exchanged or given to family members; like giving an unwanted coat to a sister, or a pair of shoes to a daughter. At the same time, the gifts resembled things that people wanted to dispose of, things like a used sofa, an old table or shoes given to the maid. These gifts were objects that contained ambiguous meanings, as they could be understood by domestic workers as tokens of appreciation and care, or as exchanges that augmented class and status inequalities between employer and employee.

The world of second hand gifts

The gifts that women received from their employers were distinct from those that someone buys for a birthday or Christmas present (see David Cheal 1987). Overall, items given to domestic workers were commodities handed to people who were assumed to accept them out of need or obligation. It took me a while to understand the logic of these transactions and, because I had very little contact with employers of domestic workers (as well as with the majority of clients of sex workers) my views on these exchanges derived from the relations with my informants, and hence from their perceptions of the objects received.

Let me illustrate the different perceptions of second hand gifts with Felipa's story. During my first visits to Felipa's flat I was impressed by the number of things, in particular pieces of furniture that were scattered everywhere in the house. The rooms, including the kitchen and the hallways were full of different types of furniture. One of the rooms, which originally had been the lounge of the flat, Felipa had made into her bedroom. Apart from the bed and several chests of drawers, it housed a big wooden dining-room table with six matching chairs. This table did not really match the logic of her bedroom, which made me wonder about its presence there. When I asked her about the table and chairs as well as the rest of the furniture, she told me that they were all gifts. Gifts, from whom?, I wondered. They were from her former employer, Fiona.

Felipa was a Mexican woman who had worked as a live-in domestic worker for an English family in Kensington for six years. She was the cleaner of the house and was also in charge of taking care of three girls. The oldest girl was six, the second was four and the third was only three months old. Whenever I asked Felipa about the different employers whom she had worked

for over the years as a domestic worker in London, she constantly mentioned Fiona and the girls. She always referred to the children as 'my girls' and considered Fiona her favourite employer. They were like family. After six years of working at Fiona's house and ten years of struggling with the Home Office, pregnant Felipa gained her British citizenship and with it was able to access some of the social benefits offered by the state. As a disabled (Felipa suffers from polio) future single mother, she was granted a council flat for her and the baby. Whilst asking her about the different furniture that occupied her house, she explained to me that Fiona gave her most of the old furniture that she had in her house as gifts for the new flat. These objects, as she told me, were part of a continuous flow of gifts that Fiona gave her such as clothes, shoes, and bags. However, the furniture was the ultimate gift as it allowed Felipa to equip her new flat fully. More importantly, she perceived the gesture as a symbol of the emotional intimacy and care that she shared with the family she worked for.

In February of 2011, Felipa decided to make some renovations around the flat including new wall paper and new carpeting. She also planned to get rid of unwanted furniture, which never occurred. Cristina, a friend of Felipa, spent several months trying to convince her to throw away several of the tables, chests of drawers and chairs that once belonged to Fiona. Cristina claimed that the reason why Felipa kept all of these things, including bags of clothes in closets that were waiting to be sent to Mexico, was because she came from a very poor background. Although Cristina did not know Felipa's family or had never been in Mexico, she claimed to be able to read Felipa's social class through her ethnicity (Felipa had indigenous background), her previous occupation (she had worked as a maid back in Mexico) and her poliomyelitis. It was not the first time that Cristina had made remarks about class intertwined with ethnicity.⁷⁸ As a result, she explained to me that because of Felipa's background this was the first time in Felipa's life when she had owned things. Cristina used to say that Felipa was experiencing the "*Diogenes Syndrome*" and that she would end up having no space to move in the house. Felipa usually laughed at this remark and said, 'I do not know what you are talking about Mrs. Cristina, I do not get rid of these things because they were presents, I feel bad to throw them away'. She would

⁷⁸ She once told me how when she was young back in Ecuador she had been in love with an indigenous man. Although she said that she really loved him, she explained to me how she could not establish a relationship with him because her middle-class family would have never approved that she wanted to be with an *indio* (indigenous). The same occurred, while in London, when she started "dating" (through the internet and occasional visits) an Ecuadorian man who lived in Sweden. She told me he was ugly, she looked like an *indio*, therefore she could not tell her sisters or daughters about her romance as they will make fun of her.

then explain to me that these were not “only things”, these objects were Fiona’s things, therefore she felt she should keep them even though she did not necessarily need them. By throwing them away she felt that she was being unthankful and showing no gratitude to her former employer. Somehow the tables, chairs and the bed held a part of Fiona and the girls, these things were a constant reminder of her “other family”.

Consequently, these gifts strengthened the bonds that existed between Felipa and the family she worked for; bonds that were created through her care and love towards Fiona’s family while performing her job. In Felipa’s understanding, the gifts came from pure appreciation and recognition for the work she did over the years with the family. Therefore she felt morally indebted to the family. Hence, every time that Fiona called Felipa to baby-sit her girls for a few hours she would always do it without any economic retribution as she considered that receiving money was inadequate and - more importantly - ungrateful. In contrast to other employers, Fiona always wanted to pay and never took advantage of her position of power within the labour relation, yet Felipa never accepted the money as it was her particular way of reciprocating and making sense of the transaction. She was not Fiona’s employer anymore; hence the relationship between them involved other social identities as well as different roles and duties. As a friend, Felipa could not charge for her services because she was not working but doing a favour for a friend. Thus, Fiona would then pay with more gifts to Felipa and Jennifer (Felipa’s daughter) whenever she needed her help.

The relationship that Felipa developed with Fiona was very different from other long-term relationships she established with other employers. The difference consisted mainly on the ways in which other employers constantly took advantage of her, paid inadequately and never demonstrated any type of gratitude or respect towards her work. ‘I worked and lived with a family for four years before I met Fiona, they were really rich but did not treat me well. I was treated as a working machine. I do not think they considered me a person’ she told me. Even though she worked for a long time with this family, Felipa did not feel any attachment or developed feelings of care towards them as she did for Fiona’s family. Although they also gave second hand “gifts” to Felipa, these items were not perceived as gifts for her, they were just things that employers wanted to dispose of, ‘but instead were given to me, the maid’, she commented.

Felipa’s story mirrors those of other domestic workers who chose to care for and

developed emotional intimacies with certain employers. The intrinsic nature of intimate labour allows for the development of other exchanges besides those established by the contract relation and, as we saw with the sex workers permits the development of kin-like relationships or other forms of relatedness. Stories like Felipa's uncover the fine line that exists between doing intimate labour through the performance of emotional labour and the developing of actual care for the people she for. Unfortunately there were cases where the exchange of gifts gave way to relations of debt and labour ambiguity instead.

Because "you are part of the family"

In Chapter Four, I explained the complexities and consequences when domestic workers were addressed as being "part of the family". Anderson (2000), among other scholars (Cock 1980, Romero 1992, Bakan and Stasiulis 1997, Moukarbel, 2009), has talked about how domestic workers can easily get trapped in the web of emotional labour; and I would add that - in the presence of gifts combined with being branded as "just like family" - the labour relation and contract becomes more ambiguous than what already is (Anderson 2000:122-125). Gift-giving in the realm of domestic work has been analysed under the rubric of maternalist practices (as mentioned in Chapter Three), whereby employers give old clothes and items to their maids in order to sustain power inequalities. As Romero notes, "this practice of giving old clothes within a work setting is unique to domestic settings. It is almost inconceivable that the same woman would consider offering her old linen jacket to her secretary" (Romero 1992:109). Yet, as Parreñas found among Philippine domestic workers, gift-giving was not always a deliberate form of exploitation on the employers' side, but was a sincere display of affection that in many cases conveyed advantages for the workers (2001:187-188). Felipa's story demonstrated how the idiom of affection could be genuine. However, in other cases it became a strategy to negotiate power and regain some sort of control over the worker.

An illustration of this is the case of Cristina from Ecuador who worked as a live-in domestic worker and nanny for a rich family in London. Similar to Felipa and other women in my research, Cristina received second hand things from her employers as "gifts". However in contrast to Felipa's story, once Cristina started receiving gifts, her employers started asking for

“favours”, which really meant the supply of off-duty hours of labour. Like Felipa, Cristina was required to clean, iron, do the washing and take care of three children. Her shifts were long and usually involved her spending hours carrying the baby girl while cleaning the house. She was well paid and the family provided independent quarters for her to live in the house. As a result of her relationship with the baby girl, her employer Paola (the mother) frequently told Cristina that she was like a second mother to the girl; she was “like family”. Consequently, like family, she often received used clothes and shoes that Paola did not use or want anymore.

In addition to this, Cristina was allowed to attend English classes twice a week, time that was granted by Paola as a gift, with the caveat that she had to pay back the hour she missed of work (one hour out of ten working hours per day) by doing extra work around the house on Saturdays. Cristina’s English classes were a benefit that she received because she was “part of the family” she told me; therefore as part of the family she had to reciprocate the benefits and gifts she received from her kin. She worked from eight in the morning and was supposed to finish her shift by eight in the evening. This, however, was just an illusion, “a dream” as she called it, as she was constantly asked to help with some extra chores when she was supposed to be off duty. But she was “like family” and family help each other, therefore she could not say no when Luca, Paola’s husband, constantly asked her to iron his shirts for the next morning at nine in the evening. Even though she was tired and could not care less about Luca or his shirts, she knew, as she told me, that there was no possibility to say no. Saying no would only cause trouble with the family and might risk losing her her job. All in all and regardless of the emotional blackmail, she thought of them as decent people who treated her well. More importantly, Cristina thought of the English classes, the accommodation and the “gifts” she received from them as bonuses on her employers’ part.

The apparent “equal exchange” of labour, care and gifts between Cristina and her employers created a moral obligation to reciprocate even if that meant the provision of free labour; therein doing favours appeared to be a normal outcome of the labour relationship. As Romero states: “When employers grant favours, make promises and give gifts, the employee becomes ensnared in a web of debt and obligation that masks considerations of the employee’s rights.... Gift-giving is simply another employer tactic of keeping wages low and for extracting additional unpaid labour [from] the employee” (1992:131). Similar to Angelica in her ambiguous relations with clients, the moment Cristina wanted to modify the tacit agreement of working for

free by doing favours the relations with employers changed and problems started. As a consequence, Cristina's employers stopped considering her "family". Cristina commented to me once that she was told to be only interested in money and ungrateful with them, who had taken care of her, treated her like family and gave her things. For her being "like family" implied the beginning of an ambiguous labour relation that placed her in the middle of contradictory feelings of care, emotional labour and labour exploitation. By contrast, as Felipa's story demonstrated the physical intimacy between employer and employee - in addition to the exchange of gifts - evolved into emotional intimacy and created permanent kin-like relations and trust. In Felipa's case, the exchange of gifts and counter-gifts (in the form of things or services), maintained the strong links that arose as a result of care work. In Cristina's case, the intimate labour and the emotional intimacy that she invested intertwined with the debt relations arising out of the presence of gifts, were used by her employers as an excuse to minimise her rights.

Gifts or charity

I have explained that not all domestic workers experienced the same type of physical and/or emotional intimacy and not all of them were required to perform emotional labour in their everyday activities. In spite of the latter, women received different gifts from the hands of their employers. For those, who worked as housecleaners and as a result did not experience the same intimacy with employers, gifts acquired different meanings. They signified not reciprocity but charity. For example, Juliana, to whom I have referred in Chapter Three, worked as a housecleaner and therefore had very limited contact with her employers. Still on some occasions, as she told me, even though she did not really know the employer, it was common to find bags with notes: "*Para voce Juliana*" (for you Juliana). The bags were usually full of clothes and shoes, among other objects. For Juliana such transactions were considered as something that looked like charity, nonetheless she did not feel diminished by such exchanges. In her view, this disposal of commodities was just part of the excessive consumption that Londoners engaged with as a result of having access to cheap manufactured goods; 'people in London have an excess of clothes because things are very cheap compared to Brazil; therefore people had to get rid of the extra things, so they give it to us', she explained. Once Juliana received a bag full of "goodies", she would immediately choose the best things for her and distribute the remaining items among her

friends or family in London. Sometimes she would send things to Brazil and on one occasion I also was the beneficiary of some of these items. These items were not perceived as gifts or signs of affection or gratitude from her employers, but part of a wider trade off and flow of goods, more like the impersonality of aid. Eventually those things would end up in a charity shop anyway - she said - or in someone else's hands, she was just part of a bigger transaction. As a result the transaction of these things/gifts/commodities did not entail relations of reciprocity for Juliana, even though she appreciated the items. She did not feel morally obliged or in debt to her employers for the things given, on the contrary, she was helping them to get rid of things that people did not want. Instead of giving the clothes to a charity shop, her employers told her once, they were giving them to Juliana.

This disposal of commodities extended to people beyond the domestic worker. Rosa, who worked as a live-in domestic worker and lived inside her employer's home, had limited space in the house to receive things from them, except from clothes from her *jefa* (female boss). For example, on one occasion on which Rosa's employers wanted to renovate the living room, she asked Rosa if she knew someone who might be interested in the old furniture. Eva, Rosa's friend, was about to move to a flat with her daughter (after acquiring the housing benefit), therefore she needed furniture. The deal was perfect for Eva, she would save money and would furnish her house with the old furniture from Rosa's boss. Eva and Rosa thought of the exchange as a disposal of old things and not necessarily as gifts, however because Rosa's boss was particularly rich the things contained a particular value for Eva. These were expensive things that complied with the sophisticated taste that Eva enjoyed. Receiving old and expensive furniture, Eva thought, was giving her a sense of distinction (an aspect that will be discussed in the following chapter). Consequently, Eva felt indebted to her friend and offered her gratitude and help as a way to reciprocate Rosa's gift. So when Rosa's husband arrived in London from Spain, Eva let him sleep on her "new" sofa for a few weeks, until he found a place to live in London. The relation of reciprocity that developed from the gift exchange was linked to the intermediary, that is Eva, rather than to the giver. It was clear for Eva that these objects were not "real gifts", still she felt indebted to Rosa for having thought of her as the recipient of the furniture.

Women certainly made distinctions between gifts and non-gifts among the things they received from their employers. On one occasion Juliana, for example, told me that she had received a birthday gift from one employer, Isabel from Argentina. She gave Juliana a wool

sweater for the coming winter, knowing that Juliana always complained about being cold. Juliana loved the jumper and told me that Isabel really thought about the present because it was exactly what she would have chosen. It was an object that expressed a personal identity and care in opposition to the impersonal and anonymous mass commodities that she received from other employers. Furthermore, it was not a matter of whether the object was new or used; Juliana considered it a gift because it was linked to the personal relations and the intention of the exchange. The birthday present would fall into the category of what James Carrier refers as the “perfect gift”; a gift that is unconstrained and unconstraining “that is a pure expression from the heart that does not bind giver and recipient” (1990:21). For Juliana a birthday gift was a “real gift”, as she told me. It was different from the other “gifts” she constantly received from other employers; it was new, but more importantly it was personal and meaningful. As Braudillard notes the significance of the object given as a gift “is inseparable from the concrete relation in which it is exchanged [...] The gift is unique, specified by the people exchanging and the unique moment of exchange” (Braudillard cited in Carrier 1990:20). For my informants, gift exchanges were inextricably linked to the relationships they had with the givers and the moments in which the gifts were given.

Fernanda, a Puerto Rican woman who was another of Juliana’s employers, often gave things to Juliana that belonged to her. Such things were not old or worn out but were clothes and shoes she hardly wore. Although these were second hand objects Juliana thought of these commodities as gifts. Because she had a relation with Fernanda these items looked more like exchanges between friends or family. Even though she only worked for Fernanda for two hours once a week, every time they casually bumped into each other they would both make efforts to communicate and show interest for each other. Juliana commented that Fernanda was a kind woman who respected her and did not treat her like a maid, they were like friends (as I explained in Chapter Three).

Hence, the perception of whether the object was a gift had nothing to do with the object itself; rather it was attached to the relationship in which the exchange occurred (Carrier 1990, 1991). In this sense, the things that Fernanda gave to Juliana had meaning and contained part of her employer, that is why they were significant for Juliana. It was also the case that Fernanda considered it unthinkable to give old things to the woman that was working for her. For Fernanda, as she told me, it was also difficult to think about these exchanges, she knew that they

could be problematic and complicate the relationship. She did not want to disrespect or offend Juliana, therefore she tried to think of these exchanges in terms of the care that she felt for her. For Juliana the things that Fernanda gave her were tokens of appreciation, the objects became inalienable, or what Carrier calls “possessions, to denote the relationship of identity between possessor and object” (1990:24) and permitted the development and maintenance of the relationship.

I asked Fernanda about her relationship with Juliana and wondered if Juliana had in any way reciprocated the gifts that she had given her. She told me that she did receive a very special and personal gift from Juliana. Fernanda was applying for a post study work visa which had become a source of preoccupation. In one of the occasions when they saw each other Fernanda told Juliana about her worries, as a result Juliana gave her the contact of her lawyer in order to help her with the case. Fernanda perceived this as a gesture that demonstrated that Juliana cared for her and considered her not as an employer but as a friend, which was something that Fernanda was trying to recreate in her relationship with Juliana.⁷⁹ Through the exchange of this particular gift, both women were able to find something in common – besides being Latin American - both women shared some sort of instability vis-à-vis the authorities. By saying this I am not trying to suggest that there were not fundamental differences between them (education, class, language, overall opportunities in London) besides the inequalities reinforced by domestic work. However this specific gift represented a shared experience between them and therefore promoted acts of reciprocity and intimacy.

However, in most cases because of the absence of a relationship with their employers, objects had no emotional meaning for Juliana, therefore such items were not perceived as gifts. More likely, these “gifts” were perceived as charity or aid given by an anonymous subject who automatically annuls the possibility for the recipient to reciprocate (see Hansen 1986). Consequently, the impersonal exchange of “gifts” between my informants and their employers did not automatically create relations of reciprocity. Gifts only became meaningful the moment the relationships with employers were meaningful and emotionally intimate beyond the labour contract. Such exchanges, then, give us space to think about gifts or commodities as part of a wider system of aid and/or recycling.

⁷⁹ Although there were important differences among them such as social class, education and overall opportunities in London, they were both migrant Latin American women who shared some sort of instability vis-à-vis the authorities.

Conclusion

Mauss' ultimate point, according to Graeber, is that the interests involved in gift exchanges have nothing to do with making a profit – or even scoring a moral victory – at anyone's expense. Gifts act as a way of creating social relations (Graeber, 2001). What I found during fieldwork was that gifts were a combination of both; gifts were spontaneous acts of generosity in which care and love were involved, but they were also used to gain economic or moral profit. Overall there are two cardinal aspects that we must take into account in order to understand these gift exchanges. Firstly, there is the unequal position within the labour relationship, that is, sex workers versus clients and employers versus domestic workers. Such relationships entail complex power dynamics and inequalities that must be taken into account while analysing gift exchanges. Secondly, it is important to understand that, at the same time, these labour relations are quite unique and differ from any other work relation. Sex work and domestic work include the performance of emotional labour which may lead to the unintended consequence of emotional intimacy and care. As a result, these gift exchanges were constrained and free, interested and disinterested at the same time. They were manifestations of care and emotional intimacy, as well as being tips or representing the recognition of a good service. They created further emotional intimacy as well as debt relations.

I have argued that the gifts that women received from clients and employers somehow normalised the labour relationship. Male clients gave specific gifts to sex workers that resembled the kind of things given to lovers or girlfriends. The gifts given by female employers to domestic workers fell into the category of things that you would give either to your daughter or sister, or to charity. Still in all cases, gift exchanges had an element of signalling the class inequalities that subsist between workers and employers. In both cases, the types of gifts that were given depended on 1) the intimacy developed through time in the relationship with the women; 2) the personal and cultural expectations of the service provided and 3) the prospects of reciprocity. Although the gift exchanges that I have presented in this chapter and the ways in which women responded to them might appear as somehow functional, it is important to bear in mind that women's choices were highly constrained. The gift-exchanges in the cases that I presented were embedded in the power relations that subsist within both occupations.

The analysis of these gift-exchanges allows us to understand the power structures and the role of class and status within intimate labour. Within the different gift exchanges presented here, we are able to see how the class and status of women became part of the exchange. This particular status was connected partly to the particular cultural expectations of clients and employers. At the same time, these expectations were deeply rooted in social perceptions of both occupations. The latter contributed and defined the way in which both women and employers/clients participated at different levels in the exchange of labour, gifts, care and intimacy, while playing different roles and re-embedding the labour relationship in different ways. The gift-exchanges that were produced between women and clients/employers exposed two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, it showed how people managed to understand and normalise relations and the purchase of intimacy that created anxiety and moral questioning. On the other, it demonstrated how people sought to either maximise the investment or cultivate meaningful relationships with the women.

The exchange of gifts that I described took place within a context of market-based forms of labour. This provides context for, and partly helps to explain, how the different women I worked with had different perceptions of the gift transaction. For some of them, receiving particular types of gifts, such as rent in the case of sex workers for example, was a fair exchange and they conceptualised it as part (albeit unwritten) of a contract. However, whenever they received a gift that was too intimate or personal they felt somehow obligated, or chose, to reciprocate. The ways in which my informants talked about and chose whether or not to reciprocate were partially drawn from personal decisions and negotiations within constraining jobs. Non-market and market forms of exchange are being used here as a form to reinterpret and sometimes contest various ideas about obligation, and freedom of obligation. Moreover, these forms of exchange, within the particularities of intimate labour, provide us with an opportunity to think about care, emotions and intimacy from a different perspective.

Addressing gifts as exchanges that - on some occasions - helped women to “normalise” the complicated outcomes of the commodification of intimacy lays the ground for what follows. The final chapter expands on the analysis of those practices that women used as a way to reconstruct what they called the “normal” and to temporarily recuperate the social status they had lost due to migration. In what follows, I offer ethnographic data that suggests how class-based aspirations pushed women to engage in different place-making practices - at a personal

and collective level - that allowed them to feel back to who they really were and to locate themselves in their new lives.

Chapter Seven

Place-making practices and the recuperation of status

Throughout this thesis I have explained that the different personal ruptures and conflicts that my informants underwent were a result of having migrated to London. As I have shown, many of these relate specifically to the downward status mobility that engaging in both domestic and sex work causes. I have also explained how, to overcome such difficulties, these women made use of a number of different resources. Migrant women, by using different resources at different levels, strove for the recuperation of their “real” person. In this chapter, I will describe and explain how women’s “place-making” practices, which were directed at the recuperation of social status, were mapped onto idioms of class difference. Feuchtwang notes that place-making is “the centering and marking of a place by the actions and constructions of people tracing salient parts of their daily lives as a homing point in their trajectories” (2004:10). The place-making practices I will refer to here are related to the economic, emotional and material investments that women put into the construction of, for example, home, or “feeling at home”. I argue that these place-making practices are intrinsically linked to idioms of class and to the temporary recuperation of their social status.

As I will explain, for some women this process signified the recuperation of the “normal”. The premises underpinning the assertion of an idea of the “normal”, expressed in the personal desires and biographical narratives of my informants, refers to those moments when women claimed to feel like themselves, when they “felt at home”. For some, this included reclaiming the middle-class lifestyle that they had previously enjoyed in their home countries, although it is important to take into account that they were striving for a higher status in London. Getting back to “normal” was related to personal class aspirations that correlated with their new lives, the conflict they experienced as a result of their decline in social status, and their undocumented status. Within this set of discontinuities, women managed – sometimes fleetingly and temporarily – to locate themselves through practices of consumption and participation in social events. Although these two kinds of activities might appear unrelated, in practice they both aided the construction of a sense of place-making on a personal and collective level.

In the first part of the chapter I will focus on practices of consumption that were directed to the imaginative, material and cognitive construction of the place of home either in London or back in their countries. I also analyse shopping practices, which were used to make sense of place⁸⁰ (i.e. to construct a sense of home) and as a means of recuperating their “real selves” through idioms of taste and distinction. The second part of the chapter addresses a different type of place-making; one achieved through sociality. I will refer to social events in which women were able to recuperate their previous social background (real or ideal) by exposing it to other people, and in doing so reclaiming part of the status that they had lost. Finally, I will refer to those cases where the production of social events functioned as a respite of peace and security for those that experienced the everyday anxieties of “illegality”. In this regard, social events constituted spaces where home was recreated.

The making of the future: imagining and making home

Early on in my fieldwork period, I was invited to the places where my informants lived. In most cases, women were constrained by, and confined to, the privacy and intimacy of their rooms. Room-doors were the entrances into their “homes”, which were kept locked at all times in order to protect both their belongings and privacy from others. The women, who generally worked for eight to ten hours a day, did not spend much time at home. Therefore they generally did not interact with other inhabitants, unless they shared a bedroom with a stranger, or met their flat mates in common areas such as the kitchen or the bathroom.⁸¹ In most cases women lived among other Latin American migrants, as they tended to look for flats where people would at least speak the same language or have a similar cultural background.

During my initial visits to my informants’ flats they were eager to explain to me that this was not their real home, and that they did not enjoy their current living arrangements because they knew what home really was. What did home mean to them? Whenever I asked such a question, women would usually explain that home, a real home, was not supposed to be shared

⁸⁰ For Cresswell, “Place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. Place, at this basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power” (2005:12). Place in this sense is a way of understanding and knowing the world.

⁸¹ Since in most cases their landlords had converted the lounge into an extra room in order to make more profit.

with strangers. Home was perceived as a family place. All of them described to me the homes in which they had lived in their countries of origin. It was the place where they lived either with their nuclear and/or extended families, or by themselves. When talking about home they would tell me how much they missed having a place to which they could return after work where they felt at ease and rooted.

Such notions of home echo those discussed in social science literature which, despite some disagreement, continues to see home as a place of respite and tranquility. Seamon argues that home is an intimate place where people can rest, withdraw from the world outside and have some control over what happen in their lives (Seamon in Cresswell, 2005:24). Home is also described by Tuan (1977), as the centre of meaning and a field of care. While my informants' descriptions and meanings of home resonated with these quintessential and traditional notions of home, the reality of their lives in London contradicted them. Home, for them, was not necessarily experienced as a place of care and rootedness. Although home was not perceived as a place of abuse and violence as some feminist and post-feminist scholars such as Mitchell (1971), de Lauretis (1986) and Martin and Mohanty (1997) have suggested, my informants experienced home in London as a place of potential conflict.⁸²

Following this line of argument, the homes of my informants must be understood as places of conflict and uneasiness; as multilocal⁸³ socially constructed places (Harvey 1996:261) crosscut by gender, class, age, different nationalities, languages and religion, among many other differences. But there is a further complexity here. Despite how contested their original family homes might have been – a matter largely beyond my grasp – their experiences of home in London provoked further contradictions. Consequently, it became a place of either multicultural dialogue or continuous cultural misunderstandings between its inhabitants about what home involved. By and large, living with strangers was a matter of concern, mistrust and conflict. This set of discontinuities generated different practices that women used to imagine and materially construct a home regardless of its temporary nature.⁸⁴ This applied both in the case of London and back in their countries of origin.

⁸² These criticisms towards more traditional notions of home originated from the fact that not all groups - whether women, children, elders, or in my case migrants - experience home in the same way.

⁸³ Margaret Rodman (2003) explains multilocality as the possibility that a single place may be experienced quite differently.

⁸⁴ A sense of place for John Agnew implies the subjective and emotional attachment people have to place (Agnew in Cresswell 2005)

'I came to London for good, I do not want to go back to Spain or Peru, I want to construct a home for me and my daughter in London. This is the place where I can actually achieve that dream', Eva told me one day while we were sitting in the tiny kitchen of the flat she shared with seven other people from Brazil in South London. Since our very first meeting, Eva had told me about her plan to apply for housing benefits in London and obtain a house for her and her daughter. She had come to London with the belief that people could more easily obtain housing through social benefits than in other countries in Europe. After endless evenings of both of us filling in the necessary forms, Eva's belief was confirmed by waiting only three months to obtain housing benefits, for a one bedroom flat in South London, for her and her daughter Rocio.

The need to have a proper home was grounded in Eva's idea of developing and securing what she called a "normal" family life in London, and had taken shape well before she had applied for the housing benefit. When I went to Eva's house for the first time in October 2009, just before her seventeen-year-old daughter Rocio came to London from Spain, Eva explained to me her future plans and showed me some of the things she had bought for the future home. In her room in South London there were two single beds, a wardrobe, an old desk, a small table and an old fashioned chair. The beds had matching duvets, cushions and pillows that were coordinated with the purple and pink motifs that decorated the room. Eva was meticulous about the decoration of her room because she wanted to create a pretty space for the two of them, even though, as she often lamented, it was 'only a room'. Incongruous with the purple and pink fabrics, Eva's room also contained two antique tables and a chair. She had bought those pieces of furniture for the lounge of her future home. While showing me the furniture she commented how the desk looked like the one that her previous *jefa* (employer) had in Spain, 'look Ana, they only cost me £20 each, look how beautiful they are, they look really refined and expensive, they are antiques' she said.

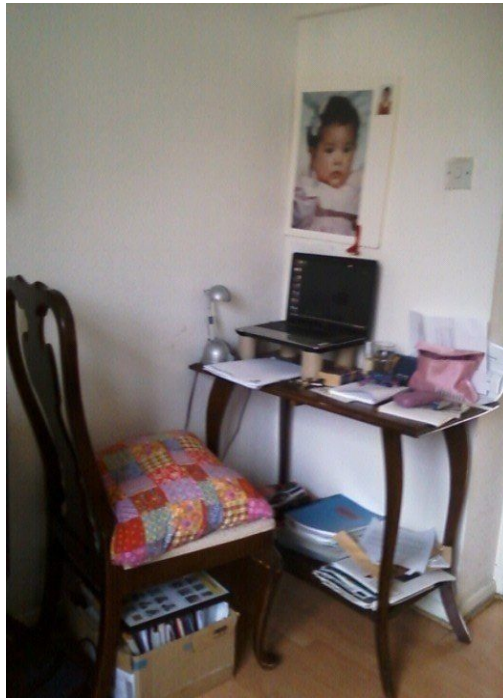


Figure 4. Table and chair in Eva's room in London (Photo of the author)

I soon realised that Eva's everyday efforts were focused on the idea of having a proper home. Eva was adamant at obtaining a real home and did not spend or waste money 'on frivolous unimportant things'. She was proud of being thrifty. She saved a large proportion of her income⁸⁵ in preparation for the moment when she acquired her house. Her monthly income was divided between groceries, transport, rent and pocket money for Rocio.⁸⁶ Although it was hard for her not to be able to give Rocio more money to buy clothes or go out with friends, Eva was materially and mentally invested in obtaining a house solely for the two of them. Her thriftiness was not rooted in ideas of saving and accumulation, but in her family's future (see Miller 1998 for the discussion of shopping as a form of sacrifice).

Eva's imaginative construction of her future home took place during the weekends when we visited car boot sales, shopped at TK Maxx⁸⁷, or went window-shopping in different parts of London (see Falk and Campbell 1997). Every time we went to TK Maxx, Eva sighed

⁸⁵ Eva had an income of approximately eight hundred pounds a month for the cleaning contracts with companies, plus the tax credit benefit and child tax credit and some days she got extra 80 pounds a month for cleaning private houses. Her total earnings approximately amounted to £1,100 a month.

⁸⁶ Also, part of her salary was used to pay the accumulated interest on a loan she had taken from a loan shark in Spain, which she had used to come to London.

⁸⁷ TK Maxx is franchise departmental store that sells signature clothing and home items at reduced prices.

melancholically while looking at the decorative objects she wanted but could not afford. She developed narratives and detailed descriptions of her future home through different objects. Simultaneously some of these objects - a lamp, vase, or teapot - were reminiscent of things that she had left behind in the shared flat where she had lived with Rocio in Madrid. These objects were “remembrances of things past” and signs of a future, of yet more improvement. She believed that, in addition to obtaining the housing benefit, in the future she might be able to buy a council flat in London.

These aspirations were interpreted by Eva’s friend Amelia, in private conversations with me, as expressing a need to have something of her own. Amelia understood and analysed Eva’s desires through the prism of assumptions about Eva’s lower-class social background in Peru, which shaped her desire to have a home. Although, by and large, women shared the same experiences of indebtedness, shame and discomfort about their occupations and their lives in London, none was certain about the others’ previous social backgrounds. My informants, nonetheless, enjoyed speculating and gossiping about each other’s past; interpreting or measuring their social background through indexes of cultural capital and taste, and in the process playing a sort of ‘one-up-man-ship’ game. Regardless of whether Amelia disparaged her social origins or not, Eva was steadfast in her plan to achieve the lifestyle she was looking for in London.

In similar vein, Mariana found it very difficult to share a house with strangers. More precisely, and closer to home, she had a hard time sharing a room with her stepdaughter⁸⁸ and living with other Brazilians who she thought did not have the same manners and education that she had. She was especially concerned about one of her flatmates, a Brazilian woman in her mid-thirties, who did not behave the way Mariana thought a respectable woman should in front of strangers. These discontinuities left her feeling, as she told me, completely out of place (*‘fora do lugar’*). Mariana missed the family house in Sao Paulo and the flat she had shared with her Colombian husband Julio back in Italy. As newlyweds, Mariana and Julio had a flat in Perugia that she considered to be her temporary home in Italy. ‘I had a home there, I bought all these things for home when I got married, I had an espresso machine, duvet covers, plates, glasses, everything; it was a real home with my husband’, she told me. At the same time, her “real home” and the place to which she wanted to return in the future was in Brazil, the flat in Perugia

⁸⁸ See p 39 for an account of how Mariana came to be living in London with her stepdaughter.

represented a temporary home that made her feel like herself because of her relationship with Julio and the gendered roles they shared in the production of the place, as she was the carer of the household and Julio was the main breadwinner. Similar to Eva, Mariana was constantly haunted by the things she had left in Perugia in order to come to London. Things that provided a source of comfort (see Miller 2008) and sense of belonging. In Italy she had had a home, spoke the language and did not have to work as a *faxineira* (domestic worker). This feeling sharply contrasted with Mariana's experiences of her current dwelling place and with the general alienation that she felt in London. However, the prospects of Julio coming to London to stay with her and his daughter provided Mariana with a hopeful future, that of constructing a home, this time in London for the sustenance of her family life.

Mariana spent hours imagining and planning for her new home in London. Skimming through the pages of the IKEA catalogue, Mariana constructed the narrative and imaginary spaces of her future home which, though temporary, had to become real; 'I need to have a house with my husband just like I had in Italy, I need to feel that I have something more than just this humiliating work and this lonely life. I need to feel normal again' she constantly told me.

Mariana's parameters of "normality" coveted the idea of having a place where she could come back every night after work, talk about her day with her husband, cook for him, watch TV and relax instead of having to cohabit in a house with strangers. In the meantime, apart from making rational and strict economic decisions for the materialization of such homes, Eva's and Mariana's imaginative practices of home-making in London constituted moments in which they could temporarily reconstruct their individual middle-class aspirations.

With echoes of this, for Sabrina planning and imagining her future home provided her with moments to withdraw from the present and recuperate her "real person". The imaginative process commenced when Sabrina set herself the goal of earning one million *Reales* (approximately £300,000). This project gradually materialised every evening when she assiduously recorded her daily incomings and expenditures in her diary. Every page of her diary bore witness of her life as a prostitute in London. More importantly, the process of writing down her daily finances provided her with the opportunity to imagine the near future, a future that included the purchase of a home. She thought of the home enterprise as a form of therapy that would help her to forget about her life in London and her experiences as a sex worker. Furthermore, thinking about the materiality of her future home also made her think of herself as

a mother of Alex and as the main carer for her family back in Brazil.

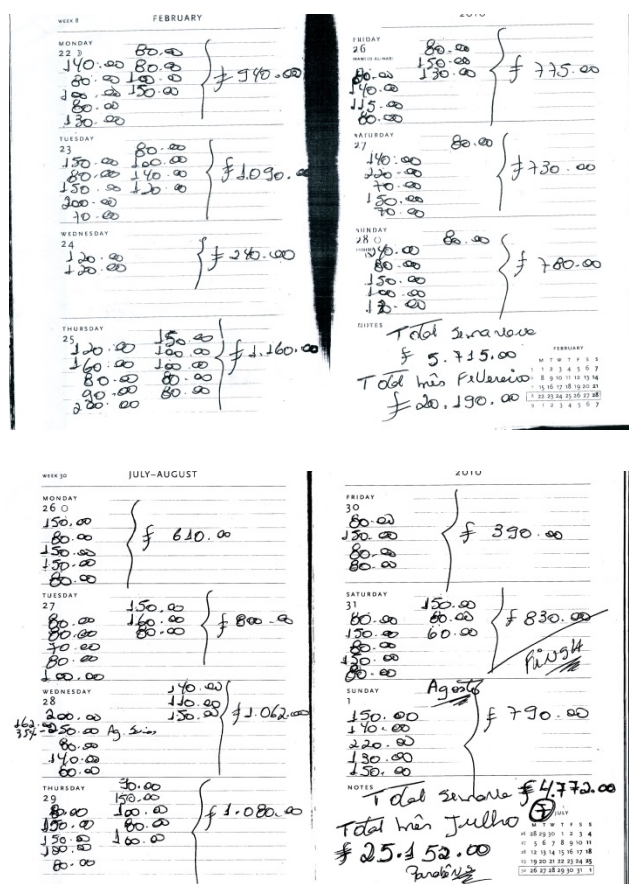


Figure 5. Sabrina's accounts.

Flipping through the pages of the Argos catalogue, she described to me the things that she liked, the things she wanted for her loved ones, and why they were such good value. In these moments her life momentarily assumed a kind of personal respectability that she had lost. As Allison Clarke explains while analysing home-making practices of women in North London, “Whether physically or mentally transforming or transposing their homes, the process in which they are engaged is socially aspirant, not merely in terms of accumulating and articulating cultural capital (Bourdieu 1979), but in terms of the ambitions and projections of ideal social relations” (Clarke 2001:25). Likewise, home-making was important amongst my informants because of the reconstruction of social relations they foresaw as occurring within those homes. Imagining the future home was a way in which to invest in the family, to locate themselves back within who they were, to re-embody social relationships, social statuses, and to recuperate the respectability that had been disrupted because of migration.

The process of home-making through shopping

The imagination of home was followed by its material construction. Once Eva received her housing benefit and Sabrina achieved her economic goals, and therefore wanted to return to Brazil, both women's shopping enterprise began. Much has been written on the study of consumption in anthropology, the discussion that follows offers a brief overview of the topic inasmuch as it relates to my ethnography.

When in the late 1970s the study of consumption became a part of anthropological inquiry, Sahlins initiated the debate by explaining how through consumption people engaged in making symbolic statements (1976). For him, the symbolic differences between objects produce and reproduce "the meaningful differences between" social groups (1976:181). Douglas and Isherwood (1978), while by the same token interested in the symbolic meaning of objects, were more concerned about the relationship between the meaning of commodities and people's active engagement with them through different social practices. Likewise, Bourdieu explored how objects carry meanings that enable people to make sense of their social world by assigning them a value. Such value, however, is rooted in people's social and cultural "capital", indexed by their sense of taste. Bourdieu's analysis of consumption moves beyond the individual's choice and places the analysis in a wider socio-cultural study of the economy.⁸⁹ In sharp contrast with this approach was the work of Baudrillard (1981) which focused on how the meaning of an object - that is its sign value - is manifested through its relationships with other objects.⁹⁰ This approach resulted in a tendency to focus solely on the object as a sign without taking into account the social context and material use. More recently, among others, Miller (1995, 1998) re-established the relationship between the object and society demonstrating how people appropriate market

⁸⁹ Bourdieu's (1984) important contribution to the anthropology of consumption is underscored by a complex model of society structured by capitals and *habitus*s. For Bourdieu, consumption practices are founded on ideas of taste as a form of cultural and symbolic capital that produces social distinctions as well as discrimination in society. Patterns of consumption for Bourdieu are articulated along the lines of class.

⁹⁰ Baudrillard explains that this structure of objects is parallel to a structure of society, in which people define themselves through their differences with other types of people. Baudrillard considers that the consumer is induced to buy within an entire system of objects by which he/she can differentiate himself/herself socially.

goods and imbue them with meaning.⁹¹

In this chapter I adopt an approach to material culture and consumption which, like Bourdieu, highlights the symbolic capital, and hence the class orientation, of my informants through taste. In this sense my analysis partly draws on Bourdieu's categories of the different capitals and understanding of taste. Taste for Bourdieu is a reflection of the interrelation between his three dimensions of social life: the economic, the cultural and the educational. It is "the propensity and capacity to appropriate (materially or symbolically) a given class of classified, classifying objects or practices, is the generative formula of life-style, a unitary set of distinctive preferences which express the same expressive intention in the specific logic of each of the symbolic sub-spaces, furniture, clothing, language or body hexis" (Bourdieu 1984:173). By using Bourdieu's theory on capital, I want to emphasise the importance that these women gave to the purchasing of particular objects as a way to reconstruct their middle classness. Although it does not account for positing individuals as plural beings who demonstrate often contradictory dispositions, it provides the tools to understand consumption as embedded in class identity.⁹² As I have explained in the Introduction, the so-called middle class that I am referring to is structured by the position of women within their own social class structure and also by its intertwining with national ideologies of ethnicity and race. Therefore, the analysis of taste must be analysed through the prism of ideologies of race and ethnicity as these are a fundamental part of their "middle classness".

Paralleling this approach, I consider consumption as a process in which women imbued objects with meaning that helped them in reconstructing or reconfiguring social relations and signal their social status. Thus, the meanings of objects are not fixed but rather shift across context, time and use. Being migrants shifted and had an impact on the way these women shopped, used and thought of things as well of the relationships embedded in those objects. Although the objects themselves are an important part of the analysis, my specific interest is in consumption as a process whereby the women realised – or occasionally invented - themselves as middle-class people having a particular taste and imagining their future lives. Similar to O'Dougherty's findings amongst the middle classes in Sao Paulo, my own research suggests that

⁹¹ Relevant to the recent ethnographies on consumption is the work of Tilley (2006). Alongside, Appadurai's (1986) seminal book, which focuses on the social and historic trajectories of objects and their politics of value.

⁹² It is important to take into account that Bourdieu's analysis does not allow for the individual to exercise agency and move beyond their predisposed *habitus*.

women used consumption as an important criteria to define social class differences and identities.

In a sense, if money was a pattern, a value measure, similarly consumption as a language functioned like a currency to measure classes, it became one of the most important resources whereby people of the middle class verbalised their class membership in general and made intra-class distinctions (my translation 1998:3)

In light of the above, let me go back to the moment Eva received the news from the Council Office about the success of her housing benefit application. Once she got the news she immediately started planning the construction of her home. The enterprise, however, was not as simple as it may sound, as she had very concrete ideas about how she wanted her house to look. For Eva, inhabiting her new home required the choosing of things that would match what she considered to embody good and sophisticated taste. Because she did not have the means to buy expensive new things, Eva's shopping behaviour encompassed an appreciation of used/second hand goods that she viewed as good quality and good value for money which signified good taste. To procure these things, Eva visited TK Maxx and car boot sales. Although she visited quite a few car boot sales in different parts of London, Battersea car boot sale on the Southbank was considered the best because it sold second hand objects considered to be of exceptional value. According to Eva, this was the place where better-off people sold their things and therefore it was possible to find the finest things for the house. Battersea, for Eva, contributed to her domestic economy and help reconstituting her idea of class identity (see Miller et. al. 1998).

These commodities coincided with the way Eva wanted her home to look, but she was not going to be wasteful in her procurement of them. Although the entrance fee to Battersea cost £5, it was possible to circumvent the cost by arriving at 1 pm, thus paying only £1.50. Sometimes arriving late meant that the best things were already taken, however she liked to think that there were always treasures to be discovered for her new place, which others might have overlooked. Eva classified the sellers distinguishing which ones sold the best porcelain, ceramic, antiques and clothes. She preferred the sellers of antiques because their wares, she felt, automatically carried added value. In order to justify her taste, she referred to the things owned by her former *jefa* had in Spain, insisting that these things were antique, expensive and sophisticated. For Eva, the value of things lay not in their being new, but in their being unique. After visiting several car boot sales,

she managed to purchase a complete set of silverware cutlery and a set of old English porcelain dishware for four people. She showed me with pride the old plates and the forks that were hallmarked, expressing her view that the hallmarks and the signatures engraved in the silver cutlery had something to do with a higher social class. As she explained to me, her taste was shaped by the experience of working for many years in a rich household in Madrid as a live-in domestic worker. Her narratives of distinction were based on the idea that 'rich people always have good taste', in contrast with the "poor taste" of the poor people (i.e. indigenous people) from Peru, for example. Therefore, owning second hand objects that might have belonged to rich people - who she imagined and described as being white - conveyed the value of distinction that new, but cheap things did not have (for example the furniture she received as a gift from Rosa's employer discussed in Chapter Six).

This contrasted sharply with Sabrina's sense of taste and consumption practices. For Sabrina the construction of home back in Sao Paulo represented the opportunity both to reconstruct her family life and to display her success as a returnee. Her home-making enterprise entailed the consumption of brand new objects. This served as a way to affirm difference with respect to those who had remained in Brazil, and simultaneously to appropriate symbols of distinction and status (*c.f.* Gardner 1993, Salih 2003). In November 2011, a month before she returned to Brazil and to her son Alex, Sabrina began her shopping enterprise. Her plan was to dedicate one day of the week to buying the things she needed for her future home in Sao Paulo. By mid-November, the living room of her flat was filled with boxes, shopping bags and empty suitcases. Over the course of just one day, Sabrina had bought eight different satin sheets and duvet covers for her own future bed, for those of her mother and her aunt, plus four goose feather pillows and one single Norwegian cotton duvet for her son. Apart from the bed sheets and pillows, Sabrina also bought appliances for her kitchen at Argos. 'I have already bought a flat in Sao Paulo. Now I want my kitchen to have domestic appliances of the same colour and design. I like the ones you can buy in Argos. You can get different brands, good brands that are quite cheap in comparison to other shops', she said. She opened a box containing a red toaster with a matching red kettle and red coffee machine. We went to the kitchen and placed them next to each other, she wanted to see them in their 'natural environment'. As Miller suggests, "material culture within our homes appears as both our appropriation of the larger world and often as the representation of that world within our private domain" (2001:1). In this sense through these

objects, Sabrina was anticipating and temporarily enacting her new middle class status back in Brazil. She was appropriating her economic success as a migrant.

The home-making process, and construction of her improved social status, entailed for Sabrina the acquisition of household goods, while at the same time she was restoring of family ties. This motivated her compulsion to buy gifts for her family, which included her three nieces, brother, sister in-law, mother, aunt and son. One Saturday, she focused her attention on shops such as Primark, JD Sports, Zara, NEXT, and H&M on Oxford Street. We spent the day going from one shop to the next in order to buy gifts she wanted to give to her family, mainly to her son, Alex. She was concerned about her son's reaction towards her after two years of absence from his life. She thought of these gifts, therefore, as a form of compensation for her absence. While we were shopping, Sabrina attached narratives to the items that she bought for her son, based on how she imagined him to use them in the future. At times such imaginings caused her anxiety, as having not seen her son for two years (except on Skype) she was concerned about estimating his size correctly. In spite of her worries she continued in her shopping endeavours, and selected the trendiest teenage fashion in London for him to wear in the future.

While Sabrina was fussy regarding the quality of items which she purchased for Alex and her aunt, she was less concerned about the gifts which she bought for the rest of her family. The presents for her brother's family were bought at Primark, where she said that the clothing was low-priced and certainly not of the best quality. But, the items were, nonetheless, fashionable and chic, and made perfect gifts for her nieces. Every skirt, shirt, pair of trousers or dress was above all selected for each of the girls according to what Sabrina thought would fit them best. Being thrifty with clothes was perfectly justified as they were kids who would outgrow these clothes very soon.

In addition to these gifts, Sabrina was convinced that she needed to buy useful things for the family that went beyond mere indulgence. The acquisition of two laptops, one for Alex and one for her oldest niece, was considered a good investment. They were intended to be used for the serious purpose of school and learning. Through these objects Sabrina was fulfilling the role of mother and caring aunt, who was spoiling children with frivolous gifts, but wanted to make sure she was also contributing to their future development.

For over three days, the packing of Sabrina's nine suitcases became a ritual constructed

upon a narrative of care and the reconstruction of kinship. This allowed Sabrina to reconstruct momentarily her role as a “proper” mother and recuperate some of the respectability she claimed she had lost through working as a prostitute. I say “momentarily” because her daily life and work nonetheless imposed itself on the preparation of the trip. The packing alternated with receiving clients and seeing Robert. Whenever Robert visited during this shopping extravaganza, he commented to me that he could not understand why Sabrina had to buy all of these items in London instead of getting them in Sao Paulo. Although he participated in the purchasing operations, willingly going to Argos after work in order to pick up the packages that Sabrina had already ordered online, he questioned the logic of returning to Brazil with nine suitcases, not least because he feared she might have difficulties with the customs authorities. On hearing such remarks, Sabrina replied that he did not really understand Brazil. In the unlikely event of having any problems with customs, she was ready to pay a little bribe to smooth the way. Still, Robert thought that her shopping practices were extravagant, flashy and overall irrational, as he thought she was spending more money by buying these items in London. In contrast, for Sabrina the purchase of these items was evidence of her financial wisdom and thriftiness. Certain that things in London were cheaper than in Brazil, she saw shopping in London as the best economic choice. Was she really making a free choice, or were these shopping practices, as is often asserted about excessive consumerism, a form of “false consciousness”?⁹³ On the one hand we could argue that she was (as Robert thought) indeed deluded and dazzled by the brands and luxury items that London offered. In a way Sabrina was falling into the traps of capitalist consumption and her own aspiration to be middle class. Through shopping she was trying to construct a middle-class aesthetics that she thought was impossible to achieve back in Brazil. However, she was also consciously using the objects for her own purpose, that of recuperating her real person and family, as well as gaining a higher social status.

Irrespective of the wisdom of this choice, there was something meaning-making about the very process of shopping and calculating how much she was going to be able to take back home. By doing so, Sabrina was performing care: she was making a contribution to the family and asserting a kinship role that she had not properly performed for the last two years. The boundaries between shallow consumerism and a more considered process of giving meanings to

⁹³ In Marxist terms false consciousness is the result of ideological control of which the proletariat is unaware. According to Boudreaux and Crampton the term is used as a label for people’s systematic failure to adequately understand and respond to social reality in full. It exists when the degree of misunderstanding is so great that people mistake social arrangements that really harm them as being social arrangements that benefit them (2003:2).

things become blurred.

The home-making process that women like Sabrina and Eva performed was intertwined with aspirations of a middle-class lifestyle, affordability and ideas of distinction. Sabrina never once considered shopping in second hand shops or car boot sales because she could not fathom the idea that people would buy what other people had already used; it was tacky and distasteful to do so. Eva, in contrast, thought of Argos and Primark as cheap stores that sold only low quality and generic items. Through buying different type of objects, each in her own way competed for social status (Veblen, 1970) and invested in their respective futures. In addition to this, the construction of home was primarily a moral act that was directed at the reproduction of their families. Through shopping, women were carrying out what Miller (1998) calls a devotional act for the members of the family: they were enacting love.

However not all women had the same resources or wanted to invest in the construction of home in the same way that Eva and Sabrina did. For some women, like Angelica, home-making was a temporary process erected through the conspicuous and excessive consumption of things as a way to fill the spaces of uncertainty and despair in their lives. It was focused on the here and now rather than on the future.

Angelica, as I explained in Chapter Five, was a sex worker who struggled making effective decisions regarding the administration of her money. She found herself in a constant state of indebtedness because of the unstable nature of her work at swing parties and in brothels, but also due to the fact that whenever she did have money she spent it frivolously. Her profligacy put her in a precarious financial situation on many occasions, when she found herself not being able to pay her rent or to remit money to Brazil. Angelica's limited options and precarious life as a prostitute provoked phases of depression, loneliness and isolation, in addition to the instability underpinned by her undocumented status. As I explained in Chapter Three, Angelica's life as a migrant had been marked by a previous deportation from Portugal and by an encounter with the police at her flat in London. This had important repercussions for the ways in which she perceived her present and future life. Accordingly, she had an immediate, 'seize the day' approach to life and consumption. For Angelica, accumulation seemed to mean more than owning things, it was a way to deal with the alienation she experienced on an everyday basis.

There were, one might say, at least two dimensions to Angelica's consumption practices.

The first was the personal dimension. This dimension responded to Angelica's desires for particular things for herself and for her daughter, whom she had not seen for years. The second dimension was more one of conspicuous shopping for the sake of accumulation. This inclination to accumulate was intimately linked to the need of making place in London. Regardless of the fact that these two dimensions might appear to be in contradiction with each other, they both acted to ease Angelica's deep-seated anxiety about her uncertain future.

The room where she lived until June 2010 in Bayswater in West London (known as *Brazilswater* because of the numbers of Brazilians living there) was packed with things including TVs, videos, shoes, clothes and beauty products. Angelica's world (her room) was filled with items she had acquired over the three years that she had spent in London. Her shopping practices were mapped around second hand shops located in affluent neighbourhoods in London, such as Pimlico, South Kensington, Earls Court and St. Johns Wood, which she preferred because they offered good quality and distinguished items that were otherwise impossible to purchase. In contrast to Eva, however, she was more interested in clothing and small items than in furniture and other more permanent objects. Her purchases included shoes, a bikini, cashmere jumpers for the coming winter, a blouse, accessories, a plastic fishing rod, and a tent. She was thrilled every time she found clothes that were of good quality and sophisticated while also being cheap.⁹⁴ This also applied to the things she bought for her family and for her daughter, such as a pair of jeans, a nice top and a purse which she intended to send as presents.

However, in contrast to Sabrina, the dream of bringing or sending the things back to Brazil was not currently possible. In the meantime, therefore, she used things as a manner to construct a sense of permanence; an aspect that entirely contrasted with her nomadic lifestyle. The more she bought, the better she felt about her living space. As well as from accruing more and more things, she enjoyed organising and reorganising them in the room. The rearranging of the room triggered memories of the things she was forced to leave behind due to her deportation. Those things were lost forever; they were ghosts that presented themselves through the new things she bought in London. In the event of future deportation she did not want to lose what she had accumulated in London, so this time she had a plan. Most of the things that she had bought for her family were already packed in air sealed plastic bags. Everything was arranged for one of her closest friends to send back to Brazil in case she got deported. Through these place-making

⁹⁴ See Hansen (2000) for an analysis of secondhand clothing and the construction of status.

practices she reconstructed the narrative of her life as a migrant that seemed to be trapped between the past (memories of things), the present (accumulation of things) and the future (when she would finally be able to send those things back to Brazil). The accumulation of objects, which were packed in order to be sent away at a moment's notice, symbolised the uncertainty of Angelica's life. I have shown so far how, in very distinctive ways, according to different personal and economic resources, women actively engaged in the creation of place in London. The things that women bought were directed at the reconstruction of home, of what some referred to as the recuperation of the "normal". Although such "normality" was contested by their shift in social status because of migration, through consumption women claimed to temporarily recuperate their affected social status but at the same time reconfigured it in new ways. Objects held meanings beyond their materiality. They were embedded within kinship relations and represented the possibility to construct permanence and place. In what follows, I will focus on personal investments through shopping that were directed particularly at the reconstruction of status and class through idioms of taste.

Investing in 'who we really are': the idioms of fashion and class

Amelia liked the idea of shopping and/or window-shopping as a reminder of her previous life. As she explained to me on several occasions, in Caracas before getting into debt she owned a flat, employed maids and was a financially successful businesswoman. As a middle-class woman Amelia was deeply humiliated by, and resentful about, being a domestic worker. It was essential for her to find ways to countenance the shame that she experienced through her current life in London.

The everyday life tensions that Amelia experienced were ameliorated by frequent visits to TK Maxx, second hand shops in South Kensington in West London and car boot sales with her friend Eva. Even though she needed to repay a €25,000 debt, she was forever telling me that spending £10 or £20 would not make any real difference to her financial situation. Amelia, being indebted and with a low income in London, was unable to live according to her middle-class aspirational taste. On the contrary, Amelia was drawn into her old *habitus* and her middle-class aspirational taste. She claimed that her consumption practices had changed dramatically from

her previous practices in Venezuela, due to her debt (*c.f.* Lehtonen 1999): and that she no longer spent money extravagantly. However, she also sustained fantasies about her past life by spending a few pounds at TK Maxx, buying coffee when going out, or buying organic food at Whole Foods Market (as her employer did) among other luxuries. She claimed to be saving money but at the same time also enjoying this particular form of conspicuous consumption that, as she said, made her feel better about herself, “less of a maid”.⁹⁵ While shopping, Amelia was able to imagine and articulate herself in relation to the past life that she longed for and found difficult to reconcile with her present situation. As Maureen O’Dougherty explains,

Through consumption, the individual or group of individuals can demonstrate a class identity, differentiating themselves from others in different ways or diluting the differences. These processes reproduce, exacerbate or modify class divisions (my translation of O’Dougherty 1998:1).

Amelia’s consumption practices and, more importantly, the display of cultural capital regarding fashion, were used as markers of class identity. She was not only trying to distinguish her earlier self from the present one, but also herself from other people.

Let me illustrate this with the following example. During our visits to TK Maxx, Amelia created narratives of taste and distinction through branded items. Amelia usually focused her attention on signature accessories and clothes that she recognised, and enjoyed telling me how she would look in them. For her, brands had special significance because of the social status that these things represented back in Venezuela. According to Amelia and Eva, shopping at TK Maxx also gave them an opportunity to buy signature clothes and accessories at affordable prices. Although Bourdieu claims that the price devaluation of fashion is a degradation in time of its distinctive value, that is to the fading away of its power of distinction (Bourdieu 1977:18), my informants’ taste was not affected by the value of the items. On the contrary, they celebrated the democratisation of consumption that London offered to the masses as they could in fact acquire signature items that otherwise would have been impossible to buy. Moreover, they appreciated the fact that these were genuine items, cheap but genuine and distinctive; this indeed resulted in the best possible combination matched their middle- class aspirational taste.

⁹⁵ As Mills observed among Thai rural/urban migrant women, consumption ‘highlights a powerful avenue by which labour migrants may pursue new forms of autonomy and agency and the construction of socially satisfying and valued identities’ (1997:41).

While walking through the different aisles, Amelia often stopped in front of the sunglasses section and tried on at least twenty of them, 'Look Ana, I look like a posh woman from South Kensington, not like a *chacifa* (maid) from London'. She stood in front of the mirror and tried on one after the other, looking at herself in the mirror and carefully styling her hair, she turned to me, saying, 'I look gorgeous, like a movie star!' She liked to explain to Eva and me how people made the mistake of buying particular sunglasses just for the sake of showing off the brand, although they often did not fit the shape of their faces. According to her, the need to show off branded goods was irrefutable evidence of bad taste, lack of distinction and class, "...the fact that fashion knowledge is acquired and embodied helps to naturalize middle-class privilege and ensures that fashion is not only the province of the rich" (Liechty, 2003:110). Through the idiom of fashion as a form of symbolic capital, Amelia performed a particular social class to which she thought she rightly belonged, regardless of her present situation in London.

Although Amelia hardly ever bought anything at TK Maxx, the shop offered a space for the existence of the "real" Amelia back in Venezuela. She constantly remarked how ironic it was that she was a *cachifa* now, '*La vida da muchas vueltas*' (life has many twists). 'In Caracas I was more like the women in South Kensington than a maid of a woman of South Kensington', she told me once, 'but this is just a temporary thing in my life', she concluded. Amongst my informants there existed a complex interaction between the past, in relation to who they really were, and the present, as a site of who they did not want to be, and who they were planning to become in the future.⁹⁶ Their shopping practices were subtly modulated by this interaction. It was never straightforward as its constituent factors were inextricably linked to money, opportunity, utility and personal taste. By the end of September 2010, Amelia decided to go back to Venezuela because she could no longer handle the humiliation of being a domestic worker in London and was experiencing severe depressive breakdowns. By the time she left London in 2010 she had accumulated a good number of things but was unable to take them with her to Caracas due to the costs of transportation. She sold most of the stuff among friends, gave some things as presents - I was the recipient of a book and wine glasses that she considered to be very refined - and the rest of the things were left for charity shops.

So far, I have explored how women engaged in the imaginative and material construction

⁹⁶ Several of my informants were saving money and accumulating further debts in order to be able to pay for cosmetic surgery. During my fieldwork, Cristina and Barbara went back to Latin America to have surgery. Whereas Amelia, Luciana and Eva were saving money to be able to do it in the near future.

of home regardless of the place and its temporariness. I have also examined how different idioms of fashion and consumption practices served as confirmation of class membership (Bourdieu 1977). Overall, I have focused on practices that women engaged with on a personal level. The next section addresses the same issues in a different manner. It considers those situations in which women's sociality reminded them of home and of who they really were.

The making of place and status through sociality

Let me continue with the story of Amelia and her friends who were also live-in domestic workers. For this group of women getting together on a Sunday felt, as Rosa once said, 'as if I were back in Peru or even Spain with my friends having coffee'. One Sunday, Amelia invited Rosa (from Peru), Cristina (from Ecuador), Eva (from Peru), Gabriela (from Portugal) and me for lunch at her flat. As I explained in Chapter Four, Amelia lived at her employer's house in a basement flat where she had a tiny kitchen, bathroom, one bed and a sofa. Regardless of her employer's restrictions and rules concerning the use of the room, Amelia had added some personal touches to the room by placing photographs of the family on one of the shelves in the room, as well as having re-arranged the furniture.⁹⁷ The place was not hers, but on this specific Sunday she had the permission of the *jefa* (female employer) to invite some friends on her day off. It was early in my fieldwork when Amelia organised this event and, apart from spending some relaxing time together, she wanted to introduce me to other Latin American women like her. When I arrived at her employer's house in Holland Park, West London, she opened the door of the basement of the house where the flat was located. She received me with a big smile and a hug; 'Come my friend, I want you to meet other women for your research' she told me. As a way to introduce me to the group she said, 'This is Ana, my friend from Mexico, she is an anthropologist and is doing a PhD in London. She is doing a study on women like us, *cachifas* (maids)'. After I had explained what it is that anthropologists do, this group of women started talking about where they came from and where they worked in London. In the meantime, Amelia, was cooking Venezuelan *arepas* (thick corn/flour tortillas) and passing them around for us to eat.⁹⁸ All of the women were talking about their own national food and making comparisons and comments amongst themselves. Amelia

⁹⁷ See also Pratt (1997) who worked with Philippine migrants in Vancouver.

⁹⁸ See pages 72-73 for the story of how Amelia came to London.

mentioned that whatever food you could find back in Venezuela did not compare to the food that you could buy in London. She explained how last week she had gone to the local butcher, which her employer frequented, and had spent £10 on organic eggs and £20 on free range organic chicken which came from the farms of the Royal family. She assured us that she did not regret having spent the money, as the meat and eggs, tasted completely different from what she had previously tasted. At the same time, the other women started commenting on how much their *jefas* spent on groceries at Whole Foods market in High Street Kensington. They were all familiar with the expensive brands and organic foods that their employers preferred. The women did not express criticism regarding the expense of their employers' taste. Rather they enjoyed the task of shopping on behalf of their employers. These shopping trips were moments when the women could practice their *jefas'* consumption practices as their own, assimilating the cultural capital and status of these *jefas* to themselves. Although the women could not maintain the same consumption habits as their rich employers in London, they enjoyed the moments when, although temporary, they were able to enact their employers' sophisticated taste.

Conversation soon turned to their families back home, mentioning matters such as the recent death of Cristina's brother back in Ecuador. When the tone of the conversation turned sad and nostalgic, Amelia decided to cheer up the mood of the party, and put on some music for us to dance to in order to forget our sorrows. She explained to us that she had a marvelous party music mix from her son's wedding in Spain that would definitely lift the spirits of the gathering. Then, to the rhythms of reggaeton, Cristina stood up and started showing us 'her sexy reggaeton moves', as she called them, while she trying to encourage the others to also stand up and join her. Dancing reminded Cristina of her youth back in Ecuador where, after escaping from home, she would spend all night in disco bars. With the music was at full volume Rosa and Amelia joined Cristina who was moving at the rhythm of *reggaeton*, emulating the highly sexual dance. Meanwhile Eva, who was sitting next to me, was laughing and blushing at Cristina's moves. In private later that evening, Eva told me that she thought Cristina was vulgar and did not behave as a woman of her age should. It was not the first time that she had made such remarks about other migrants. For her class and distinction were intertwined with respectability and that entailed a particular way of behaving in front of others (*c.f.* McAllister 1995 and Bolt 2010, 2012).⁹⁹

⁹⁹ In several occasions she told me how vulgar Nathaly, Mariana's stepdaughter, was. She associated this vulgarity to a membership to a "popular social class" back in Colombia.

Amelia was excited about sharing the wedding music with her guests. Amidst the dancing and laughing, she was telling us about her son's wedding, claiming that it had been a very luxurious, elegant event for which no expense had been spared. Later I became aware that Amelia had become more indebted as a result of the wedding, hindering her project of going back to Venezuela to her "normal" life. When the tune was over, Amelia appeared at the table with a big fancy box that contained the photo album and DVD of her son's wedding. She showed us the box with excitement and asked us if we wanted to see the wedding photos. The velvety box contained a plastic leather album with a cover photo displayed that displayed the couple in sepia. Amelia's son was in tails and her daughter-in-law was wearing a white wedding dress with a long train, and was crowned with a tiara. The photos displayed different family members, the bridal couple and various guests. Amelia's outfit for the wedding met with the general approval of her guests. She wore a long satin red dress complemented by a traditional Spanish *Peineta* (decorative head-dress) and a long embroidered mantle. This traditional outfit, she told us, indicated her Spanish heritage, which she was very proud of. After we had flipped through the pages of the photo album and listened to Amelia's narrative, she decided that we would understand the wedding best if we watched the DVD. While the film was playing, Amelia provided a detailed commentary of the wedding, which included information on famous guests who attended. People had come from Venezuela and different parts of Spain to celebrate. It was a lavish and opulent party that revealed a different Amelia who, according to her, was the "real" Amelia. The women commented on how fine and elegant the wedding was and how sophisticated Amelia looked. By showing this video to the other domestic workers, she revealed the high social status that she had enjoyed in the past. For Amelia, this was a way to exhibit her "real self".

A year after first developing relationships with this group of women, in March 2011 Cristina invited me and Felipa (accompanied by her six-year-old daughter Jennifer) to the wedding of Paola, her daughter, in Madrid. The nature of my research, and the long distances that separated my informants from their families, had previously prevented me from establishing contact with their families. Paola's wedding offered me the opportunity to be introduced to what Cristina called her 'real life', which was composed of her previous life back in Madrid, her Ecuadoran family and her extended transnational family. She wanted me to get to know her family in order to understand where she had come from, to understand, as she said, who she really was. As part of the invitation, Felipa, Jenny and I stayed in Paola's house for four days

where we were treated as part of the family. Cristina's mother from Ecuador, her *abuela*, (grandmother), and two of her sisters also flew to Madrid to celebrate. This occasion was an opportunity for all of the women in the family, including all four sisters, to be reunited.

Although most of the preparations for the wedding were already in place - many of which Cristina had financially contributed to - she was anxious to help with any last minute arrangements.¹⁰⁰ She was exhilarated about fulfilling her role as mother and being in the presence of her family. It was the ideal setting for her to recuperate the status she had lost in London. However, the recuperation of her real person required additional work, as she felt she needed to get rid of what she called the *mucama* (maid) look. To achieve this, a day before the wedding, I accompanied Cristina to a beauty salon where we spent the whole afternoon, because she needed to look "*decente*" (decent) for her daughter's wedding. She wanted to colour her grey hair and have a haircut, manicure, pedicure and a facial. This was an opportunity to pamper herself in a way that was not possible, or justifiable, in London. While we were at the salon, she told me how good it felt to be able to have some free time, and reminded herself that she had once led a different life that had included these luxuries. She wanted to look like the "real" Cristina and the mother of the bride, rather than the domestic worker she was in London.

The wedding was a beautiful event that took place in a Church located in central Madrid. After the ceremony, all of us - at least 150 guests - headed to the venue where the wedding reception was to take place. The reception started in a garden where waiters awaited us with sparkling wine and canapés. There was a quartet playing classical music to entertain the guests before they entered a big dining room where the meal was served. Dinner was a feast of Spanish food. Different dishes arrived one after the other which were accompanied by an assortment of wines and spirits that were served as the night progressed. It was a night of sumptuousness and overindulgence. For Cristina, it was an occasion to prove to her family her success as a migrant, in spite of her current situation in London. The ritual of her daughter's wedding served as a platform to regain some leverage over her life.

As I have suggested, consumption and participating in social events temporarily functioned as spaces where women regained and reconfigured part of their loss status. These spaces were needed in order for women to cope with personal dislocations. Nonetheless, the

¹⁰⁰ In fact the extent of Cristina's financial contribution to her daughter's wedding had left her in debt.

dislocations experienced by my informants were not necessarily the same. Although all of them shared a similar social status and similar class dislocations, there was a further dislocation that affected some of my informants: their status, referred to in Chapter Three, as undocumented immigrants.

As I explained in Chapter Three, being undocumented created particular restrictions and anxieties in everyday life in London. While, in this thesis I do not use my informants' legal status as categories through which to define them, being undocumented did affect my informants' place-making practices. Being undocumented, or semi-legal, meant that people were forced to engage in illicit practices and experience moral conflicts. It is mainly in contrast to the illicit practices and moral conflicts, and the accompanying fragility and impermanence of lives in London, that place-making practices among undocumented migrants needs to be analysed.

In order to understand the production and experiences of illegality we must, then, understand the moments in which people reclaimed some of their social status and citizenship; moments in which people felt at ease and not alien-like. Although many of my informants' experiences in London were usually influenced by their "illegal" status, there were some moments when this was not the case.

First of all I want to leave the darkness in which we have been living in relation to our legal status. I would like to have access to the things that people have access to: a bank loan, a house. I want to travel, give my children better life conditions. I want to go on holiday with my family, see other countries.

These words were spoken to me by Lourdes, the woman from Cochabamba, Bolivia, whose trials and tribulations with debt and illegality have been described in earlier chapters.¹⁰¹ Like her, many others had strong feelings about having been forced to live clandestinely and "in the darkness". Lourdes's quote refers to the expectation of what she referred to as a "normal life" and ideas of the middle class dream that the UK represented for her family. Regardless of their social class back in Bolivia, women like Lourdes came to the UK with the purpose and expectations of acquiring a life style that, according to her, was hard to achieve in Bolivia. Middle-class aspirations fuelled the dreams and future aspirations of my informants.

In this view, migrants invested socially and materially in their lives in London in the

¹⁰¹ See pages 63-64 for Lourdes story.

creation of a “normal life”. This sense of “normality” as opposed to illegality was augmented by the fact that many had long personal histories in London regardless of their uncertain legal situation. Indeed, the longest-standing migrants remembered how, just a few years ago, being undocumented did not represent the threat that it does now. These changes were due to the strengthening of borders, the increase of migration policies limiting access to the UK for non EU citizens and/or non-skilled labour migrants, and in particular changes in the visa system for Latin Americans because of the growth of this migrant community in recent years. This growth has resulted in both benefits and disadvantages. On the one hand, there are more social networks of fellow co-nationals. On the other hand, however, there are more restrictions for the community in terms of access to legal status.

Nonetheless, within this set of discontinuities migrants have created temporary spaces within which to live an ordinary life, to feel like the persons they used to be rather than undocumented migrants. One means was through organising and participating in social events for their friends and families or for the Latin American community. Birthday parties, baptisms, or meeting up for a *churrasco* (barbecue) after church on Sundays were opportunities in which women momentarily ceased to be domestic workers, prostitutes, and/or undocumented migrants. Apart from getting together with the people they felt close to, such celebrations included: the chance to converse and exchange information about their places of origin, to eat native the food of their countries, to dance to the rhythms of national melodies and to celebrate their nations of origin, the places to which they belonged. By celebrating these special occasions, people allowed themselves to feel at ease, to become visible and to forget about daily life’s conundrums and challenges.

Let me illustrate the above with Jovanna’s story. When Sisely, Jovanna’s daughter, turned 11 years old she had a party at her flat in South London to which guests from different parts of Latin America were invited. Jovanna shared the flat with three other people. She occupied the living room of the flat with her daughter and her boyfriend Juan and sublet the two rooms in the house to other migrants. Having control over the rent of the rooms - ‘administering the flat’, as she called it - gave her control over the common areas of the house. Consequently, Jovanna used the small courtyard at the back of the house for social gatherings of different kinds. The courtyard housed a large barbecue which had been purchased by a group of Jovanna’s friends as a way to reproduce the *churrascos* that people held in Bolivia during the weekends. On this

occasion, since it was Sisely's birthday, there was food for the children, birthday cake and a Bolivian *piñata* in addition to the *churrasco*. In the backyard Juan was in charge of the *churrasco*, while Lourdes and Doña Vilma, Jovanna's mother, were cooking the rest of the food in the kitchen. Potatoes, rice, pork, tomato salad, *yuca* (yam), *chuño* (dehydrated potatoes) and *mani* soup (peanut soup) formed part of the Bolivian feast that was laid on for Sisely's birthday.¹⁰² As well as national food, there were videos depicting Bolivian folk music and dances on the flat screen hanging on the wall of the living room. As Jovanna said, 'this party was as good as it gets back in Bolivia'. This was an occasion in which Jovanna could stop thinking about her cancer diagnosis, the daily struggles of being a cleaner and having to deal with people she did not like because they were completely different from her, as she told me on several occasions.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the party gave her the chance to forget about her current visa application which, if granted, would give her the possibility of claiming housing benefit and having a "normal" home - as she called it - with her mother and daughter.

For women who spent all week running from one job to another, these occasions were opportunities to relax, enjoy being around their co-nationals, forget about the hassles of everyday life, and dress in smart clothes. As Cecilia said, 'Today I do not look like a domestic worker, I look like myself', to which Karina jokingly replied, 'yes, you might not look like a domestic worker but you still have the hands of one'.¹⁰⁴ As O'Dougherty has stated, "it is in the tension between the specific and diverging realities and imaginings of middle-class people worked out in a field of local, national and transnational power, and their sometimes strikingly common preoccupations and tactics that we can get a closer sense of what *middle class* means" (2002:10).

These get-togethers also provided an opportunity for those who had families in London to spend time with their children and partners. While holding her daughter, Micaela - who was usually taken cared by her partner Antonio - Cecilia told me and the others how much she missed being around her. She commented how she wanted things to be the way they were back in Santa

¹⁰² Even though Sisely arrived in London when she was only six years old, she was aware of her Bolivian heritage and culture. Therefore, apart from the national food, there were videos depicting Bolivian folk music and dances on the flat screen hanging on the wall of the living room.

¹⁰³ Throughout my fieldwork I heard many comments about the friendships and relationships that women developed in London, especially with other Latin Americans, that would not have occurred otherwise because of social differences.

¹⁰⁴ My informants always complained about the callouses and dryness of their hands as one of the worst outcomes of being a domestic worker.

Cruz where women - like her friends back home - stopped working once they became mothers and dedicated their time to raising their children. On hearing this remark, several women expressed their agreement. They wanted their husbands to be able to support the whole family so they would not have to work ever again. This, they claimed, was the way it was supposed to be. In London, however, things were different. The “ordinary family life” they longed for was substantially remote from their reality. These desires corresponded with their personal ideas of family and gender roles and middle class aspirations in Bolivia which had to be reconfigured in their present lives in London. The hope that, in the future, they would eventually be able to live the way they really wanted was sustained in the present by personal practices that reminded them of home.

The baptism of Lourdes’s grandchild is another such example. One-year-old Camila’s baptism –in which I was asked to be the godmother - was an entire day of celebrating, music, Bolivian food, sweets and cake for the children and alcoholic beverages for the adults. It was a day for splurging on preparations, decorations and making people feel at home.¹⁰⁵ Following the ritual of the Catholic Church, which inserted Camila into the new faith, the celebration became a day of lavish consumption, and a performance of status and class.

As the godmother, there were certain responsibilities which I was required to fulfill. One included being in charge of purchasing Camila’s christening gown. For this task I turned to my friend Jovanna for assistance. When I asked her advice what I should buy for Camila, she told me that I should buy her a white dress. Obediently, I followed her guidance. After viewing various options, I decided to buy a simple christening gown that I thought would be appropriate for the occasion. When I showed the dress to Pamela (Camila’s mother) and Lourdes they looked quite disappointed at my choice. Saying that it was the incorrect size they told me that it needed to be changed. In search of further advice I returned to Jovanna and showed her the dress that I had selected. When I showed her the dress she laughed at me and told me I had it all wrong. The dress was too plain for *their* “taste”. ‘Ana, these are low-class people that like flashy things and have to make in impression at this type of event. You need to buy a big, garish dress for Camila’ she told me. I was surprised by Jovanna’s remarks about Lourdes’ family social class, especially by the condescending tone that she used while describing them. She explained that she cared for

¹⁰⁵ The expenses were covered between Camila’s father, Ricardo, a Colombian man who had been living in the UK for many years and held British citizenship and Pedro.

these people, but that they belonged to a different class. Class was not, therefore, only reconstructed and performed in these events, but also through the way people positioned themselves vis-à-vis others to define themselves as different. It was not only their taste, but the fact that Lourdes' family had indigenous background (they were originally from Cochabamba and La Paz) that gave Jovanna the authority to signal them as "lower class". This perception, however, stood in sharp opposition to the way in which Pedro and Lourdes defined themselves as middle-class people, particularly in relation to their levels of education (see the case of Pedro which was addressed in Chapter Three). Regardless of their social background in Bolivia, which thanks to migration was reinvented by most people, these events allowed people to make sense of the new place. In the making of new places, on the one hand they were able to reinvent their social class, but on the other, they remained trapped in social class stereotypes that prevailed in their countries. In the next section I explore how women used the memory of place in the production of grand scale community events.

Constructing place through transnational events



One day I received a phone call from Cecilia asking me for a favour. It was quite common for me to receive these types of phone calls, as the women I worked with often required my assistance, mainly with translations. However, this time the request was of a different nature. She wanted me to be one of the judges for Miss Santa Cruz 2011. She had formerly taken part in various organising committees for the different festivities that occurred in Bolivia, especially those with a connection to her home town, Santa Cruz. Cecilia's request originated from her concern about gossip regarding favouritism in previous pageants. My role as a judge for the upcoming Miss Santa Cruz and Miss Primavera (Spring) 2011 was thought to guarantee an

impartiality.

Miss Santa Cruz is an annual beauty contest in which the winner of the pageant earns her place at the Miss Bolivia contest, which eventually leads to the Miss Universe pageant. As Cecilia explained to me, even though the winner of Miss Santa Cruz in London does not get to participate in Miss Bolivia, 'we are providing the Bolivian community with something that is done in Bolivia and represents the beautiful women of Santa Cruz'. She subsequently explained that Miss Primavera did not exist as such in Bolivia, but they decided to include this title to celebrate the coming of spring in Bolivia, which occurs in September. This beauty contest has been celebrated in London for the last couple of years, a sign of the increase in the numbers of Bolivians that live in London. It was an event that reminded them of their country and of their previous lives. People were able to stop thinking about their jobs and their problems (including their legal status), and celebrate together. As Cohen, Wilk and Stoeltje have argued, "beauty contests are places where cultural meanings are produced, consumed, rejected, where local and global, ethnic and national and international cultures, and structures of power are engaged in their most trivial but vital aspects" (1996:8). Cecilia once told me how hard it was for her to think about the future because of her uncertain life in London caused by her legal status and the permanent possibility of deportation. As a result, she refused to make long-term plans and stuck to short-term ones that had an immediate impact on her life in London. Organising events for the Bolivian and the Latin American community in general enabled her to forget about the difficulty of planning for the future.

This year's pageant was much like those of previous years, as Cecilia explained to me. Two of the judges in this year's beauty contest already had a *favorita* (favourite). Viviana (the favourite) had participated in the previous Miss Santa Cruz but had not won the title. Therefore many people were expecting her to win the crown this time. I was warned of this, and I promised Cecilia that I would be as impartial as possible in my judgment. The pageant was held at a big, brightly-lit hall that belonged to a Protestant Church in South London. The place was filled with big round tables where people were sitting and drinking Fosters beer, eating Bolivian *empanadas* (pastries) and chatting. Each table supported one of the four candidates that participated in the contest. The people sitting around the tables had banners with encouraging messages written on them, confetti, blowouts, streamers and all the other paraphernalia necessary to celebrate the coronation of the next Miss Santa Cruz.

The event started with a speech by a famous radio presenter (within the Bolivian community), who I had encountered at other Bolivian events. He talked about the beauty pageant and the gorgeous women from Bolivia. He also referred to the fact that the Bolivians who were in London were hard-working, good people who had migrated to accomplish a dream, a better life in London. He mentioned that it did not matter what they were doing in London because they were all searching for a similar dream. He added that this type of event brought together the community and above all made them feel as if they were in Bolivia. 'We all have difficult lives in London, we all work really hard in order to accomplish a dream, let's forget about our jobs and our problems, today is the day to demonstrate to other fellow migrants who we really are', he said over the microphone.

Most of the women in the event were elegantly dressed in long or cocktail-style dresses, while some of the men were wearing suits or blazers. As Jovanna told me, it was an event at which people liked to look their best and forget about the fact that they were cleaners or undocumented migrants in London. She then joked about the fact that this was the perfect place and occasion for the Home Office to arrive and detain a good quantity of *ilegales* (illegal) migrants. Her remark was a reminder that the presence of Immigration officers was a continuous threat. After the performance of two traditional Bolivian dances, the presenter announced the beginning of the beauty contest. Cecilia had already explained to me that the pageant involved three categories according to which I, together with the other four judges, would have to make my evaluation: traditional dress, formal dress, grace and personality. The candidate that collected the most points in each category would become the winner of the pageant. The candidates started by modeling the traditional Bolivian dress and walked through the venue so that everyone could see them. They then all came in wearing the formal dress. At the end of the parade, they were interviewed by the presenter who asked each of them a different question that related to the Latin American community in London.



Figure 6. The four candidates wearing traditional dress, London 2011 (Photo of the author)



Figure 7. The four candidates wearing formal dress, London 2011 (Photo of the author)

But what interested me in particular were the answers that each candidate gave when interviewed. They all referred to their tough lives in London as migrants and how these events reminded them, and the community, of who they really were and how proud they were of being Bolivian. The caveat, I would add, is that they were a particular type of Bolivian. The fact that the four candidates were “white” looking corresponded with specific ideas of race, indigenusness and beauty that pertain in Bolivia (Fabricant 2009, Canessa 2008, see Rogers 1999 for a similar account in Ecuador). In contemporary Bolivia, images of feminine physical beauty are overwhelmingly white, and from a very young age girls (those both indigenous and non-indigenous) are exposed to the image of what the standard of feminine beauty is, that of the white western woman (Canessa 2008: 45-46).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Throughout my fieldwork I came across racial remarks regarding whiteness and superiority (towards indigenous peoples) among my informants, especially those from Santa Cruz. Consequently it was no coincidence that the contestants shared a particular beauty prototype which has been persistent in Bolivia (as well as other parts of Latin America). As a region Santa Cruz is quite proud of their European white looking population and of having fewer indigenous people than other parts of Bolivia like La Paz (Fabricant, 2009).

During the beauty contest, I started to understand to a greater extent the prevalent racism of *Cruceños or Campas* (people from Santa Cruz) and the importance they give to “looking white” rather than indigenous. In this regard, Wade maintains that despite the fact that *mestizaje* was historically used as a category for nation building, “a progressive process in which black and indigenous people would be integrated into a *mestizo* nation that was moving towards whiteness” (Poole 2008:181), it also contributed to the coexistence and interweaving of racism and mixture (Wade 1993).¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, these ideas of ethnicity and race correlated with peoples’ ideas of what an *illegal* looked like: the darker the skin, the more likely the person to be in the country without authorisation (Chapter Three). The beauty contest of Miss Santa Cruz responded to wider concerns and ideas about race and beauty in Bolivia. And yet the participants were not part of the white elite, but defined themselves as *mestizos* of Santa Cruz – middle-class people who had left Bolivia in search for a better life. It was as if, by performing these roles in the beauty pageant, they were able to alleviate the difficult and precarious lives led in the UK by them and their audience, and acquire a different class, ethnic/race identity in the process. At the same time, the women were able to fulfill the role of a beauty queen regardless of their social position. Through Miss Santa Cruz people collectively made claims about their social and class aspirations; it became a collective vision of what it means to be from Santa Cruz.



Figure 8. The winners: Miss Primavera, last year’s queen and Miss Santa Cruz 2011, London. (Photo of the author)

¹⁰⁷ There is extensive literature on race and racism in Latin America. See Wade (1997, 2005, 2008), Poole (1997), Lovell (1994).

The winner was Rosalia (third woman on the right of the photograph above), who was the most “Latina” looking. She was the contestant I had voted for. However, when my friends knew that I had voted for her, they were surprised and disappointed by my choice as she was not -according to them - the best looking woman of the contest. There was a unanimous preference (among my friends) for the woman that fit the European model of beauty (the first woman on the right on the photograph above). They wanted to prove that Santa Cruz had its own “European beauties”. After the event my judgment and ideas of beauty were questioned by many of my friends.

Through this event women like Cecilia, reproduced those practices from Bolivia that made them feel closer to being European; that meant they weren’t as different as previously supposed. Furthermore, this event, along with several others, represented a strategy to enact simultaneously some sense of ordinariness *and* extraordinariness. For Cecilia, the organisation of such events gave her the necessary leverage that she needed to recuperate a bit of her social status as she constantly told me. But at the same it was extraordinary the fact that she was doing this in London, as she said, she would never have had the chance to do it in Santa Cruz. Miss Santa Cruz, among other social events, symbolised home and therefore the possibilities to temporarily locate themselves back into place.

Conclusion

The stories presented in this chapter describe the efforts that middle-class women migrants made in order to reconstitute their class, status and disrupted lifestyles, while at the same generating new ones. I have showed how women regained some status through different home making practices. This did this either by imagining home, or by engaging in the actual material construction of home in London or back in their own countries. Home making practices included shopping as a resource to invest in their present lives and their future home projects. Shopping and commodities allowed them to reconstruct fragments of their homes or build their future homes. At the same time, women engaged in consumption practices as investments in their own persons. Regardless of whether they shopped for their home or for themselves, consumption became a social practice used to cope with the tensions derived from their low status as low-

income workers in London. Through consumption, they were able to make themselves distinctive in terms of taste and remind themselves and others of a lost distinctiveness that they claim to have once unproblematically possessed. Consumption practices were used as a strategy to balance their middle-class backgrounds against their current precarious position in the labour market in London. By reclaiming class membership through consumption or displaying signs of distinction women also made investments in a more communal social life. The participation and production of social events created spaces of existence in which women momentarily recuperated the social status lost because of migration, or even tried to transcend their origins and strove for a higher status. Although this feeling was shared by all of my informants, those who were undocumented migrants experienced further anxieties as they were experiencing the threat of deportation as an everyday possibility. The organisation and participation in social events of different kinds provided fundamental spaces of existence where they could feel at ease. They participated in and created events that mirrored the social events back in their countries of origin, as well as inventing new ones and outdoing those home-based events. As much as marking *national* membership, these occasions were opportunities to redefine their class membership, assert their individuality with regard to the collective and display their authentic selves. Through the analysis of such practices, as O'Dougherty states,

We can gain critical perspective on the insistence, or better, the investment, by middle-class people in defining boundaries, finding and creating distinctions (Bourdieu 1984), in constructing their sector as occupying a totally separated incommensurable universe from an "other" (adjacent sector of the class or other class) (2002:7).

The place-making practices I have referred to, as they represent individual practices, are thus detached from a slightly more political intention. On the contrary, women were not only trying to "make home nice" because of their lack of entitlements and rights, but were trying to insert themselves and construct a new class identity that was in the middle of recuperating their old status and dealing with their new downward class membership in London for them and their families.

Conclusion

Finally ordinary ethics recognises human finitude but also hope. Ordinary experience encompasses the inevitable cracks and ruptures in the actual and the ubiquity of responses to the ever-present limits of criteria and paradoxes of the human condition, hence the attempts in everyday practice and thought to inhabit and persevere in light of uncertainty, suffering, injustice, incompleteness, inconsistency, the unsayable, the unforgivable, the irresolvable, and the limits of voice and reason (Lambek 2010:4).

This thesis has analysed the life histories and experiences of Latin American women migrants in London. My work has been an effort to understand trends of female migration as an intrinsic part of the modern global system (Sassen 1999) while, at the same time, incorporating individuals' migration experiences. Rather than juxtaposing the two perspectives, it has looked at individuals' decisions to move to different parts of the world with the intention to reconfigure their life projects or start anew; and at how these decisions and dreams were intertwined with wider structural socio-economic factors affecting their host countries. Latin America, as a region, has long suffered the impact of political, social and economic policies that have stymied individuals' aspirations and fractured their planned-for life courses. These effects have been experienced, in particular, by those stuck between the elite and the poor. Such groups have found themselves struggling to maintain the lifestyle they desire. Middle-class people in Latin America experience inequality at a variety of levels: both relative and absolute. In relative terms, they are worse-off than local elites; in absolute ones, they lack opportunities to get a middle-income job and better themselves and their families. Combining both, they express exasperation at their futile struggles to progress up the social ladder.

The frustrations of my informants, as middle-class people, emerged in large part from the economic, social and political stagnation that prevails in many countries in Latin America, which sustains current social inequalities and which has been particularly extreme in the wake of the global financial crisis. My informants came from different parts of Latin America and had quite different lives but shared the burden whose ultimate origins lay in structural adjustment and

neoliberal policies that obstructed their chances of achieving what they believed to be a 'good life'. Although the poorest sectors of the population in Latin America were the most affected by such policies (particularly women, as Stromquist (1999:18) has suggested), middle-class people were hard hit by unemployment and the resulting lack of opportunities.

The women migrants portrayed in this thesis self-identified as middle-class people. This meant that they shared similar ideals and notions of morality. They also identified similar factors as having obstructed them from maintaining their social status and class identity. In their host countries the struggle to keep from slipping down the class ladder provoked situations of indebtedness that they found impossible to solve or sustain any longer. As I explained in Chapter Two, debt and the motivation to be able to pay what they owed was a significant reason for women to migrate. The prospects of coming to the UK in order to save money and pay their debts, and eventually achieve the middle-class lifestyle that they could no longer attain in their countries of origin, 'pushed' women away from their homelands and families.

Overall, women migrants were pursuing economic dreams that fitted their particular middle-class lifestyle. Acknowledging the difficulties in defining this wide class category, I looked at the tensions between women's realities, tactics, preoccupations and imaginings of being middle class as they played out in London at different times and places and in different relationships. Through the understanding of women's imaginings of what it mean to be middle-class, I tried to analyse and frame the contradictions - and their consequences - that women faced on a daily basis in terms of legal status, labour and social relations.

The contradictions between labour and class

The contradictions that migration provoked for my informants were augmented by the problems that some of them had to face regarding their "illegal" status, and the low status and exploitative nature of their work. As I demonstrated in Chapters Four and Five, women experienced a status dislocation because of the occupations they "chose" in London. As middle-class people, women never expected to work as domestic or sex workers. But given their limited choices they found themselves trapped in the unequal dynamics of intimate labour that placed them in disadvantaged positions. Paradoxically, in some cases, these constrained work roles based on

strict gender stereotypes offered women some leverage rather than simply pigeonholing them in a negative way. There were marked contradictions between the pool of opportunities for migrant women willing to fill the 'care gap' and the stagnation that these jobs represent in terms of income, modifications in gender roles and gaining real empowerment, even in liberal states such as the UK.

These contradictions were enhanced by the intricacies of domestic and sex work regarding the decision whether or not to 'provide care'. Such a decision, I argued, emerged from the intrinsic features of both occupations that complicated labour relations, but at the same time facilitated emotional intimacies and meaningful bonds that would have been difficult to create and sustain otherwise. As intimate labourers, women stood at the crossroads of a monetary transaction and relations that were tinged with intimacy and/or eroticism. These features, as I have shown, problematised the meanings and dynamics of intimate labour and demonstrated how this form of labour was different from any other job. Intimate labour entailed a particular set of labour relationships and, as a result, particular outcomes. I explained how women and employers and/or clients tried, at different moments in the labour relation, to turn intimate labour into a pragmatic market relation. This proved to be far from simple. First, the flexibility (and illegality in the case of sex work) of both occupations impeded the formalisation of the labour contract. Second, intimate labourers performed physical, mental and emotional work that, when combined, resulted – in many cases – in an 'uncomfortable' intimacy that was difficult to pin down. As Constable reminds us, "As the scope of commodification expands more deeply into various realms of intimacy, it involves a range of countervailing discourses and actions involving reciprocity and gift giving, claims to altruism, assertions of love, and claims of bounded authenticity" (2009:58), aspects that certainly became part of the everyday lives of women. This thesis has explored and tried to understand the labour and personal conflicts created by the commodification of intimacy. It also examined how far women felt they were commodified in the process of being intimate labourers and, more importantly, how they reacted to this form of commodification.

Through the analysis of intimate labour, this thesis has demonstrated how domestic and sex work reflect gender and social inequalities that persist in western societies, and how the people who engage in these types of work potentially experience extreme forms of personal alienation. The alienation I refer to relates to their work but also to their own 'emotions' as

Hoschschild (2003) has convincingly argued. Intimate labour requires us to frame and develop different paradigms for its understanding, as it is a form of labour that intrudes into the worker's sense of self and morality and therefore facilitates personal estrangements. In this regard, it complies with other forms of labour within capitalism; the difference, I argue, is that it challenges the ways in which we think about intimacy.

Working on the self

My informants' narratives were always tinted by an expression of separation between who they were back in their countries, and who they were in London. The "real self" was a person in the past who was somehow on the verge of disappearance as a result of the complexities and moral challenges of their lives in London. However and at the same time, one could argue that because of migration, undocumented status, and downward status mobility, but foremost because of work, women had to think about and construct a sense of a "real self". This "real self", who was located in the past, converged with their everyday work in which they were required to perform activities as if they were other people who provided care. This resulted in moral dilemmas that required them to step away and reflect on the situation. I have referred to this as the judgment they engaged with in order to make ethical choices. I argued that such decisions helped them in separating from their "real selves", while at the same time fashioning other persons and/or other identities. On many occasions the choices were guided by the transference of kinship idioms and practices. In other cases they were guided by the need to deal with the situation at hand, although in the process they made counter-intuitive moral decisions. Yet these persons (and choices) were temporary as they were thought of as being destined to vanish in the near future. Within this set of complexities, women migrants' social identities became liminal, fluctuating between the past, the present and the future.

At these moments women faced themselves in the mirror of the present and were confronted with images that contained important contradictions with their past lives. They had declined in social status, moved out of the class to which they rightly belonged, were performing work they found demeaning, and had changed from legal to illegal beings. The roles they were expected to fulfill, as mothers, sisters, friends, migrants, daughters, lovers, wives, prostitutes,

cleaners and carers, had also altered irrevocably. But through judgment and ethics they reconciled their past lives with their present and imagined the possibilities of constituting themselves as different persons in the future. Likewise, as Lambek states – “ethics is part of the human condition; human beings cannot avoid being subject to ethics, speaking and acting with ethical consequences, evaluating our actions and those of others, acknowledging and refusing acknowledgment, caring and taking care, but also being aware of our failure to do so consistently” (Lambek 2010:I).

Within these patterns of gender inequality, labour exploitation and the problems that were expressed through the commodification of intimacy, I have tried to show how women’s choices were framed as individual possibilities for action: if not for change, for agency. These decisions did not necessarily emerge from a rational choice made by an individual selecting one possibility amongst many others. These women did not have many choices to select from. Instead, they were framed by power relations, social discourses and women’s understandings of these dynamics, which motivated them to act in a particular way. Through the analysis and focus on the everyday practices of people experiencing change, I wanted to show, as Ortner expresses how “the ability of social beings to weave alternative, and sometimes brilliantly creative, forms of coherence across the damage is one of the heartening aspects of human subjectivity” (1995:186). In this regard, I have explored the problems and opportunities that emerged from migration, and shown the situation of migrants, not only as actors in the global economy, but also as individuals involved in an intimate process that modified their sense of personhood. Through the lens of ethics and morality I analysed the everyday subjective experiences of migrants and situated such practices as a prism that refracted a situation of liminality, but that at also contained the possibility of hope.

Epilogue: the future

I presented a snapshot of an eclectic group of Latin American women in London. My ethnography has opened a window onto the lives of people who became my friends. It gives an account of how they were living, and what they were thinking and talking about, when I met them. The question that remains is: where are these women now? Is the future, (now the present) as bright as they

wanted it to be? Are they now enjoying the world they hoped for and imagined back in 2009? The future, which at times presents itself as a moment of hope and aspiration, at others of doubt and uncertainty, is an intrinsic part of the migrant experience. To provide some closure to the life histories that I have presented, I will give the briefest sketch of what happened to them after the period depicted here.

After I finished fieldwork I remained in contact with my friends. Although I made efforts to establish a new form of relationship that would entail some distance, being in London challenged this possibility. Their lives continued to develop parallel to mine and they wanted to see me as often as we had before. Some women changed their lives radically, others did not. Some disappeared from my life, but many remained and kept me as part of their families. Many of them achieved what they'd planned to, others carried on deferring the realisation of their ambitions. All, in different ways, kept dreaming about a better future. This imaginative practice was a key feature of their real lives in the present; it was not a fantasy, but the possibility of reconstructing the life and the person they felt they had lost as part of the migration process, yet modified.

The hope of documents

One of the main aspirations for the future was to be able to secure legal status in the UK. In 2012 Lourdes and Pedro, after being in the UK for eight years, gained their residence permit by claiming the right to family life under article 8 of the Human Rights European Convention. The news was celebrated as the grounds for beginning a new life. As Pedro said, he was no longer invisible as he had now been given the opportunity to be what he 'really was'. With this remark Pedro referred to his previous undocumented status and to the possibilities that the residency meant in terms of his profession. For Lourdes it meant that she would be able to ask for benefits for herself and her children that would guarantee some income for the family. Of those she obtained, the housing benefit was the most significant as it allowed the family to move in to a separate residence rather than sharing their accommodation with others, and therefore gain some of the social status they had lost.

In sharp contrast to Lourdes, Sarita is still struggling with her undocumented status and is

currently waiting for the appeal against the refusal of her application. She is praying and hoping that she and her family will get the visa, as she does not want to move back to Honduras. She believes that she and her family are good migrants, hardworking people, who deserve to stay in London. The wait and the fear of being deported, however, keeps Sarita in a state of anxiety. In similar vein, Cecilia and Antonio are still dealing with the weekly demands of reporting to the Immigration Office and awaiting possible deportation. They do not have much chance to change their undocumented status in this country as they do not fit the requirements by law. Their undocumented status does not allow Cecilia to travel to Bolivia. Nevertheless, even though she runs the risk of not being allowed back in the UK and thus foregoing the plans she has for her daughter's future, she has been thinking about undertaking the journey in order in order to visit her sick father.

Returning home

For others the future involved going back home. For Sonia the present and the future look promising. After winning a substantial lawsuit against the taxi driver who ran her over back in 2009, she earned £70,000 and returned to Bolivia. The money; she said, would be used, first of all, to pay the debts she still had in Bolivia while the rest of the money will be used to buy a house. After almost four years of not being able to pay back the money to loansharks and family, Sonia felt that she was finally in a position to clear her name and to mend her own and her family's dignity, one that she had lost by becoming indebted. Not many people in London knew about the money, she had chosen not to tell her friends as she was convinced that they would start asking for money. She is back in Bolivia with her sons, grandchild and her four dogs, and is currently thinking about setting up a new pharmacy like the one she had before migrating.

My dear friend Juliana went back to Brazil, back to her elderly mother and her partner. The house that she was constructing with the money she earned in London was ready by the time she returned to Brazil. Since she went back she has been busy dealing with the final arrangements of the place that will cement her future. Juliana tells me in her emails that she is thrilled to be back to see the house, to be with her mother, partner and family. Although she says that she misses London and wants to come in the future, she is proud to be able to bear the fruits

of her hard work. In the same vein, Mariana left London and went back to Brazil. She tells me that she feels she has reverted to who she really was thanks to the fact that she moved back to her mother's house and also because she started a post graduate course that keeps her busy, motivated and, as she says, using her brain. At the time of her departure, her relationship with Julio was still on shaky grounds, they did not know if their relationship was going to survive the distance. However, after talking and agreeing that they wanted to be together, Julio moved permanently to Brazil in August of 2012. They decided to stay permanently in Brazil and in June 2013 she gave birth to a beautiful baby boy named Giovanni. In the end, after many twists and turns, she found love and achieved the dream of constructing her own family.

Similar to Mariana, Sabrina went back to Brazil in December 2011, back to Alex and her family. She was thrilled to be able to be a mother again, but was feeling (as she told me) a bit out of place. Although she already had bought several flats, which included one for her mother and another one for her aunt and Alex, she wanted more money to buy a separate house: one she had fantasised about as the perfect home for Alex and herself. After deliberating for a few months, Sabrina decided to return to London in July 2012. The plan was to stay in London for one year and earn the rest of the money she needed, as she said, to secure her future. She set up a flat and worked with a new friend, Joanna, until October 2013 when she left for the second time. This time I had the chance to meet her mother. As I had done before, I helped to conceal Sabrina's London life from her mother. On the 16th of October, both women embarked on a twenty day cruise that took them to Brazil. She promised me that this time she would stay in Brazil with Alex, she felt she was ready to stay and construct a family life again. I felt sad saying goodbye to her.

Similar to Sabrina, Amelia went back to Venezuela after growing tired of the humiliation associated with being a domestic worker. She went back to her flat in Caracas and started working in a real estate company, but after a few months she had to come back to Spain because of the death of her mother. The death of her mother unearthed a series of financial problems and expenses that she was unable to solve. With debts accumulating, Amelia decided to return to London in March 2013 and work, once again, as a live-in domestic worker.

For women like Jovanna going back home did not involve achieving the future she had wanted for herself and her daughter. By the end of my fieldwork Jovanna's cancer was back and had already metastasised. Although she remained hopeful about healing, the doctors in the UK told her there was nothing they could do to stop it. She then decided to go back to Bolivia and

find an alternative treatment, which unfortunately did not help, but gave her the chance to see her father and siblings. After a month of being there she came back to London as she wanted to find a way to guarantee that, even in her absence, her daughter would be able to stay in London and that she could have the opportunities she had hoped for. During our last days together, Jovanna's concerns about her daughter's future occupied her mind. She tried unsuccessfully to find someone who might adopt Sisely. In the end, she accepted that the best thing for Sisely was to go back to Bolivia and live among her family. Jovanna, Sisely and Vilma went back to Bolivia in January 2013. She spent the last months of her life among her loved ones and died on the 16th of April of 2013.

Still hoping

Among those who are still in London, life has taken different routes. Monica and Vanessa left sex work for personal and very different reasons. Monica started a new relationship with a client who eventually asked her to move in with him. Her plan of setting up a masseuse clinic with her sister never materialised, but her dream of having a family did. Monica is now pregnant and living with her partner who wants to take care of her. Vanessa, on the other hand, stopped receiving "help" from Mark and was abandoned by her husband Giorgio. For a while she continued seeing clients but she grew tired to performing the emotional labour required by the job. She was not meeting any interesting men and the bills were expensive. She moved out of the flat and decided to get a job at a coffee shop and recently became the nanny of two children of a German couple in London. The jobs keep her busy, however she cannot help to think about her future in which, in order to renew her visa, she would have to prove that she has been in a relationship with her husband. When the time comes she will not be able to prove that she has been married to a legal resident and therefore runs the risk of losing her visa. Meanwhile, she still has hopes to find the man who will love her and take care of her.

Those who remained in their original occupations are still struggling with the daily hassles that these entail. Amanda, Angelica and Denise still work as sex workers. While working from a flat with two other girls, Amanda was violently attacked by a group of men that came into the flat. In contrast to Sabrina she did not report the assault to the police as she was too scared of

being charged and prosecuted for managing a brothel. She currently works in a flat with a friend in common, Joanna, who worked with Sabrina during the last year. Amanda is still hoping for the best, sending money to her family back in Brazil and dreaming about the day when she will eventually go back home.

Eva, Felipa, Rosa and Cristina are still in London working as domestic workers. Eva also became a Mary Kay sales woman and wants to set up her own business. Her daughter is now at University, something in which Eva takes great pride and that makes her adventure to London worthwhile. Felipa still works as a domestic worker but now spends more time doing care work within the family: she became an aunt in 2012 and in order to help her brother and sister-in-law while they work, she takes care of the baby girl three times a week. Rosa still works in the same house as a live-in-domestic worker. She continues to struggle with her employer but is unable to leave her job. Her situation as a lone migrant has been eased by the fact that her husband moved to London because of the dire economic situation in Spain. Cristina, on the other hand is no longer working as a live-in domestic worker, instead she works in a number of houses all over London. In February 2012 she went back to Ecuador to fulfill a dream she had cherished for several years, to get plastic surgery. She had not managed to save up enough money to pay for the operation, so borrowed from her brother. Thanks to the surgery, she came back to London feeling like a 'new woman' and ready to find a new romantic partner – something that has not yet materialised. Her family situation back in Ecuador is complicated, however, as her son was imprisoned for selling drugs. Because of this, Cristina needs to send most of her income to Ecuador in order to pay for lawyers and to provide for her grandchild. Her dream of saving money for the construction of an eco-hotel in Ecuador has been set aside for the time being, yet she is still hopeful that she will one day be able to go back and live the life she dreams of.

The stories that I have presented demonstrate how women reoriented their futures through hope. Regardless of the difficult lives that they might have had in London, and of new difficulties emerging upon their return home in some cases, women continued hoping that, at some point in the future, they would attain the lives they imagined before migration. The temporal dimension of hope placed women between the present and the immediate future. On the one hand, hope sometimes appeared as "a positive resignation" (Crapanzano 2003:6) in the present, but was transformed into an active desire for the future. These desires were articulated towards ideas of stability and happiness that turned out to be difficult to achieve. Nonetheless,

the capacity to keep hoping remained a central aspect in women's lives. The hope for the future kept them motivated although, on a daily basis, they found themselves being exploited, morally challenged and trying to assert a personal position. It is the interrelation of hope with ambitions, failures, successes and disappointments – an interrelation comprising discourses, material investments and imaginative processes - that gave substance to the economy of their dreams.

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