"Quiero ir y no quiero ir" (I Want to Go and I Don't Want to Go): Nicaraguan Children's Ambivalent Experiences of Transnational Family Life

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Resumen

Este artículo explora las experiencias de los niños nicaragüenses cuyas madres han migrado. Utilizo la idea del "imaginario del migrante" (Jackson 2008) como marco teórico para capturar la manera en que las experiencias subjetivas que los niños tienen de la migración, son estructuradas por procesos sociales, culturales, políticos y económicos. Demuestro que los niños son actores centrales en procesos mundiales de migración (Coe et al. 2011). Conscientes de los factores (principalmente económicos) que empujan a sus madres a emigrar, los niños participan del proceso como receptores de las remesas en niveles materiales y afectivos, forman vínculos relacionales con sus abuelas y otras cuidadoras ante la ausencia de sus madres, y responden con incertidumbre a la posibilidad de reunificación con sus madres migrantes en países de destino. El deseo ambivalente de los niños de estar tanto "aquí" como "allá" (Hondagneu-Sotelo y Avila 1997) -tanto en Nicaragua con sus familias extendidas como con sus madres viviendo afuera – es central en el imaginario que los niños tienen de la migración y en su experiencia real de formar parte de una familia transnacional. [migración, Nicaragua, niños]

Abstract

This article explores the experiences of Nicaraguan children of migrant mothers using the framework of the migrant imaginary (Jackson 2008) in order to capture the ways children's subjective experiences of migration are structured by broader social-cultural and political-economic dynamics. I demonstrate that children are central actors in global migration processes (Coe et al. 2011): keenly aware of the (primarily economic) factors pushing their mothers to migrate, children engage with remittances on

material and affective levels, form relational attachments to their grandmothers and other caregivers in their mothers' absence, and respond with uncertainty to the possibility of reunification with migrant mothers in destination countries. This ambivalence, children's desires to be both "here" and "there" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997)—both in Nicaragua with extended families and with mothers abroad—is central to children's imaginaries of migration and to the reality of their lived experiences of transnational family life. [children, migration, Nicaragua]

In a recent issue of this journal (JLACA vol. 17, issue 1), several scholars studying transnational migration in the Latin American context engaged with the idea of increasing human mobility as a central characteristic of contemporary transborder movement in the region (Hernández-Castillo and Hernández 2012). An emphasis on human and cultural mobility, and on the permeability of national borders, has characterized much of the anthropological literature on transnationalism in past decades (see Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996; Kearney 1995).[1] However, recent ethnographic literature on transnational family life has emphasized the persistent significance of national borders in structuring family members' subjective experiences of transnational migration (Boehm 2012; Foner 2009; Horton 2008; Menjívar and Abrego 2009). In my research with Nicaraguan transnational families, national borders and immigration policy regimes continue to matter a great deal, as they structure the ongoing physical and temporal separation that characterizes transnational life. Moreover, for Nicaraguan children of migrant mothers in particular, transnational family life is an ambivalent social, cultural, and emotional space. This article argues that children form an "imaginary" of migration (Schmidt Camacho 2008; Jackson 2007) that reflects the complex and compounding influences of their understandings of their mothers' migrations, their experiences of remittances, the relational ties children form with their surrogate caregivers in mothers' absences, and the uncertainties surrounding possible "reunification" with mothers in destination countries. I highlight the term reunification here to reflect the ambivalence contained by the prospect of children's rejoining mothers in destination countries. While this migration offers children the chance of "reunifying," "reunification" simultaneously implies leaving behind their grandmothers or surrogate caregivers. Thus, for children, mother–child reunification and caregiver–child separation are two dimensions of this difficult and ambiguous prospect.

To comprehend the complexities and ambiguities of children's lived experiences of transnational migration, I draw upon Michael Jackson's conception of the "migrant imaginary." For Jackson, the migrant imaginary is a social-cultural and

psychological-moral space within which migrants engage their hopes and dreams for migration within the tensions, demands, and disillusions of immigrant life (Jackson 2007, 2008). Jackson uses an existential and phenomenological approach to capture the complexities of contemporary transborder migrants' lives and situate lived, subjective experiences of migration within broader structural-historical contexts. According to this view, migration implies both a release from "time old patterns" of cultural tradition as well as a sense of possibility about the "new departures" that life in destination countries may entail (Jackson 2007:106). The notion of the migrant imaginary encompasses both this sense of hope and possibility as well as migrants' feelings of longing for home, guilt about leaving family members behind, and "cultural disorientation" (Jackson 2007:109). Significantly, for Jackson, the concept of the imaginary allows anthropologists to move closer to the subjective and intersubjective processes that are implicated in what he describes as migrants' "nebulous yearnings, vague imaginings, and wishful thinking" (Jackson 2007:131). This article engages with this sense of uncertainty, of hopes and desires for the future playing out against present-day realities and tensions of transnational life; it seeks a means by which to make sense of the subjective experiences not of migrants themselves but of children left behind by the global political-economic processes that are pushing their mothers to migrate.

Whereas Jackson has demonstrated how the migrant imaginary is a useful construct through which to understand the structural and subjective experiences of migrants themselves, this work considers the ways that children of migrants also form what can be considered an imaginary of migration. In other words, the Nicaraguan children of migrant mothers with whom I work have not themselves crossed national borders, but transnational migration transforms their social, relational, and affective worlds nonetheless. I aim to show how a singular narrative of migration as a dream or hope for a better life fails to encompass the entirety of these children's experiences of migration: the imaginary of migration that children form is polysemic and ambivalent. As discussed below, children in Nicaragua feel partially "pulled" by the experiences of their migrant mothers in host countries: children share in these experiences through transnational communication and the economic, social, and emotional ties that migrants' remittances reinforce. And yet, since they form strong affective relationships with their grandmothers, other caregivers, and extended family members in their mothers' absence, children also remain attached to "home" in Nicaragua. Thus, children's subjective experiences of family life become suspended across national borders that separate children spatially from their migrant mothers. In this way, children (like their migrant mothers) engage with desires to be both "here" and "there" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997)—both in Nicaragua with extended families, and in destination countries alongside their mothers. Immigration policy regimes that prolong family separation also compound the uncertainty of potential reunification, further

reinforcing children's ambivalent experiences of parent migration and of transnational family life (Menjívar and Abrego 2009). It is this ambivalent experience of separation, attachment, longing, and desire that is the central characteristic of the imaginary that Nicaraguan children form of transnational migration and family life.

Here, I employ the notion of the migrant imaginary as a way to situate the subjective experiences of Nicaraguan children of migrant mothers within broader social-cultural and political-economic processes. In the following sections, I review the dynamics of contemporary Nicaraguan migration, the feminization of migration, and the consequences for children in transnational families. I briefly describe the methods employed in this study before turning to an in-depth exploration of four dimensions of children's experiences that emerged as most salient to understanding children's migrant imaginaries: first, the relational attachments children form with their grandmother caregivers; second, children's understandings of the (primarily economic) reasons for their mothers' migrations; third, children's engagements with remittances and transnational communication; and fourth, children's ambivalence surrounding potential "reunification" with migrant mothers. This discussion shows that although children may feel "pulled" by the possibility of rejoining mothers in destination countries, they are simultaneously tied to Nicaragua, especially through the strong affective bonds they form with their grandmothers—women who have assumed care for children in mothers' absence. As a result, children's imaginary of migration is characterized simultaneously by hopes and fears, longings and desires, and the push and pull of their relational and emotional attachments. The impact of transnational migration on children's lives is illustrated by the words of a child who, facing the possibility of rejoining her mother, told me, "quiero ir y no quiero ir" (I want to go and I don't want to go). This phrase captures the way children feel pushed and pulled between their lives in Nicaragua and the possibilities of reunification with their mothers in destination countries, suspended in the ambivalent space of transnational family life.

Nicaraguan Mother Migration and Transnational Family Life

In Latin America, it is estimated that women comprise more than 50 percent of transnational migrants (Pessar 2005). This statistic captures what has come to be described as the feminization of migration (Parreñas 2001a). Following this pattern, more than half of contemporary Nicaraguan migrants are women, and most are young (under 40), meaning they are of childbearing age and often leave children behind when they emigrate (Torres and Barahona 2004). The reasons women migrate without their children are complicated, but reflect the danger and

risk involved in border crossing, the uncertainty of immigrant life abroad, and the costs of social reproduction (Menjívar 2000). In other words, whereas mother migrants can count on members of extended kin networks to provide unpaid childcare in Nicaragua, in destination countries they would probably have to pay for childcare from limited immigrant wages.[2]

Like most contemporary Latin American migrants, Nicaraguan women leave their home country primarily due to economic push factors. Central among these are the lack of job opportunities in Nicaragua and the relatively greater income-earning potential in destination countries. As transnational migration flows along lines of global inequality from relatively poor to relatively wealthy nations, principal destination countries for Nicaraguan migrants are Costa Rica, Panamá, the United States, and Spain. It is estimated that more than half a million Nicaraguans live in Costa Rica alone, the majority of whom are undocumented (Rocha 2009).[3] The United States remains a destination for Nicaraguan migrants since the social upheaval of the U.S.-backed Contra invasion of the 1980s, which sought to undermine the Sandinista revolutionary government. Recent Nicaraguan migrants to the United States often have family members who arrived decades earlier, established themselves socially and economically, and are therefore able to offer resettlement support to newcomers.[4] Like women migrants globally, Nicaraguan women living abroad usually find employment in the domestic and service sectors of destination country economies, thus participating in what has been described as "global care chains" through which women's reproductive labor is globalized via transnational migration (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Hochschild 2000).

Ethnographic research with transnational families has demonstrated that family relationships transcend nation-state boundaries and involve members on both sides of national borders (Dreby 2010; Fog Olwig 2003; Menjívar and Abrego 2009). Fog Olwig in particular has argued that the family is a constructive site for analyzing macrolevel cultural processes such as globalization and transnational migration. However, much research on transnational families has focused on the experience of mother migrants in destination countries (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Horton 2009; Parreñas 2001b), telling us less about emotional and relational experiences of children in migrant-sending countries. With other scholars of transnational family life, I am interested in the ways those physically left behind by global migration processes, such as children in migrant-sending families, are centrally engaged as social actors in transnational processes (Duque-Paramo 2012; Fouron and Glick-Schiller 2002). This article, then, focuses on children's intrapersonal experiences of transnational migration and also the ways in which important interpersonal (kin) relationships shape children's subjective experiences. Children's imaginaries of migration reveal transnational family life to be a deeply ambivalent and uncertain social-cultural field.

Children's Experiences of Parent Migration

The literature shows that gendered cultural values for family life influence children's responses to parent migration (Parreñas 2001b; Pribilsky 2001). Parreñas (2005) in particular has argued that patriarchal values, which assign primary responsibility for children's care and emotional support to mothers, magnify the negative emotional impact mother migration has for children. Thus, children may experience mother migration as a form of abandonment despite mothers' attempts to stay in touch, send money back home, and mother from abroad (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Horton 2008; Parreñas 2001b). Furthermore, broader community and social discourses that blame migrant parents, and migrant mothers in particular, for having left children back home may reinforce children's sense that their parents' migration is a form of abandonment (Duque-Paramo 2012; Pribilsky 2001). On the other hand, surrogate parents and extended family and community members can reinforce children's sense of connection with migrant parents living abroad (Dreby 2010; Schmalzbauer 2004). In particular, as shown below, the relationships children form with their surrogate caregivers may offset their sense of loss by reinforcing emotional connections within their extended family. Additionally, surrogate caregivers can shape the imaginary that children form of migration through the stories they tell about migrant parents' departures and the narratives that are co-created in order to make sense of mother migration.

In Nicaragua, cultural values for family life hold mothers responsible for forming primary emotional attachments with children and for assuming the majority of child caretaking. Nicaraguan family life is both female centric, with women forming the center of household activities and extended family relationships, and yet patriarchal, with men assuming controlling roles within conjugal relationships (Lancaster 1992). Nicaraguan values emphasize mothers' selfless sacrifice for the sake of their children and families, which partially reflect a prevalent, albeit problematic, cultural trope of marianismo (Navarro 2002). Given such gendered values, mother migration means something different to children than father migration. In particular, when Nicaraguan fathers migrate, mothers usually assume responsibility for children, representing greater continuity in children's lives. On the other hand, when mothers migrate, caregiving responsibilities shift to grandmothers and other female kin, possibly resulting in a greater sense of disruption for children.[5] Furthermore, cultural values for family life, such as the importance of "unidad" (unity), understood as shared sacrifice and collective problem solving, may be threatened by mothers' transnational migration. However, cultural values can also help children make sense of mother migration, especially when grandmother caregivers and other family members reinforce the idea that migration is actually an extension of mothers' responsibilities to sacrifice for the sake of children and families back home. Further, the ideal of selfless sacrifice also shapes grandmothers'

motivations to assume caretaking for their grandchildren upon their daughters' migrations.[6] In these ways, mothers' transnational migration both threatens to undermine idealized family relationships and yet simultaneously opens space for a reworking of family roles and a reconfiguration of caregiving relationships (Coe et al. 2011; Horton 2008). As will become apparent in the discussion that follows, Nicaraguan children's responses to this refashioning of family life are influenced by the ties they form with their grandmother caregivers, their perceptions of their mothers' motivations for migration, experiences of remittances and transnational communication, and prospects of future reunification with mothers in destination countries.

In addition to gendered cultural values, the spatial and structural dimensions of migration shape children's migrant imaginary. For example, mother migration means something different for a child whose mother lives in Costa Rica compared to a child whose mother is in the United States, simply because geographical distance matters for the possibilities of mothers' return visits home. Immigration policies in host countries structure transnational family life by making it difficult and costly for mothers to obtain legal permanent residency or citizenship for themselves and then to petition for their children to join them (Horton 2008; Menjívar and Abrego 2009). Research with immigrant families in the United States has shown that children were more likely to experience parental migration as emotionally troublesome and even traumatic when the time frame and possibility of potential reunification with parents were uncertain (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001). By extension, it is likely that children in sending countries such as Nicaragua experience greater emotional distress when the possibilities for future reunification with their mothers are unclear. The imaginary that children form of transnational migration is deeply ambivalent both because it reflects the shifting emotional landscape of transnational family life—as children form strong ties with grandmother caregivers and grow apart from their migrant mothers—and because it is shaped by the unsettling prospect of leaving grandmothers and extended families in Nicaragua for an uncertain future with mothers abroad.[7]

Methods and Participating Families

The data upon which this discussion is based are drawn from research conducted with 15 Nicaraguan families of mother migrants in Managua, Nicaragua. The data are drawn from a larger project exploring intergenerational caregiving in transnational families and the roles of Nicaraguan grandmothers who assume care for children of parent migrants.[8] Given these aims, selection criteria for families in the study were threefold: (1) the family had a mother migrant currently absent due to migration; (2) the mother migrant had left at least one child, aged

6–13, in Nicaragua; and (3) a grandmother was the primary caretaker for the children. Families were recruited for participation through my involvement in two migrant-serving NGOs and through word-of-mouth referral. Usually, I completed interviews with grandmothers and possibly mothers (when they visited Nicaragua or, on occasion, when I visited them in destination countries) before sitting down to interview at least one child in each family. Grandmothers (and, when I was able to reach them, mothers) gave permission for their children to participate in the study. In four of the families I interviewed more than one child; in three of the families I was unable to interview children for logistical reasons. I developed a Child Interview guide consisting of 15 open-ended questions, which asked children to respond to prompts such as, "tell me a little bit about your family," "who do you talk to when you have a problem or concern at school?," and "how did you feel when your mother first left?" All interviews were conducted by the author in Spanish in children's homes and lasted from 20 minutes to more than one hour. At the end of the Child Interview, I asked children to "draw a picture of your family" and gave them a blank piece of paper and crayons with which to do so. My aim was to give children an opportunity to render their understandings of their families graphically if they had been unable to do so verbally.

In addition to interviews, I also employed extensive participant observation with children and families, including spending time in family homes, helping children with homework, engaging in after-school activities, and taking children on outings to see movies or visit the mall. Like most ethnographic relationships, the more time I spent with children, the more they were willing to open up to me and share the more difficult emotional aspects of their lives in transnational families. Given the ways these relationships unfolded, I found myself growing emotionally close to certain children, and began to spend more time with them over the course of my fieldwork. With these children in particular, I found myself having to manage these relationships cautiously, negotiating the boundaries of observer–ethnographer–participant–friend with great care. The majority of the fieldwork for this research was conducted from July 2009 to July 2010. In addition, I have returned to Nicaragua on three subsequent occasions to visit families and I have maintained contact with children using Skype, Facebook, and e-mail communication.

The destinations of the migrant mothers in this study reflect contemporary Nicaraguan migration patterns, and include Costa Rica (7 families), Spain (3 families), the United States (3 families), and Panama (2 families). Children in 11 of the families live in popular barrios of Managua, Nicaragua's busy, chaotic capital city of about two million residents; children in the other four families live in rural communities outside the capital. The average age of the children discussed here is ten years old and the length of mother migration varies from less than one year to more than ten years. While all families in this study share a similar social class position (working class or working poor), their social and economic

resources vary in ways that matter to children's experiences of transnational family life. For example, some grandmother caregivers have little to no formal education, others have completed secondary school; some children live in households with no working adults and are thus entirely dependent on migrant remittances for survival, while others share homes with aunts, uncles, and other family members who hold wage jobs and contribute to some extent to household maintenance.[9] A commonality among these families is that, reflective of broader patterns of paternal irresponsibility in Nicaragua, most children's fathers have limited material or relational involvement with them. Fathers live with children in only three of the 15 families in this study; in the other 12 families, fathers separated from mothers before or after mother migration. In all families, given the study design, grandmothers are the primary caregivers.[10] This means that grandmothers engage in everyday acts of care—preparing meals, washing and ironing children's clothes, overseeing homework and school responsibilities, and receiving and managing remittances sent by migrant mothers. Furthermore, over time, children's affective ties toward their grandmothers strengthen, which may help children negotiate the difficult emotional consequences of mother migration (Schmalzbauer 2004). However, as I argue here, the stronger children's ties are with grandmothers, the more complicated their relationships with their mothers may become, especially in the face of the uncertain possibilities of future reunification with mothers in destination countries.[11]

Living with Multiple Mamás

Nicaraguan children of mother migrants grow up in households where grandmothers, other women in networks of extended kin, and community members play primary roles in their caretaking. Intergenerational caregiving is one way transnational families respond to the disruptive potential of economic globalization and parental migration (Fog Olwig 1999; Schmalzbauer 2004). For the children in this study, grandmothers not only provision the everyday caregiving that is essential to their well-being, but also come to represent children's primary affective relationships in mothers' absence. These children describe themselves as having "multiple mamás" (multiple mothers), including their grandmother caregivers, but also their aunts and other female kin who play an important role in their lives (see, e.g. Seymour 2004). If migrant imaginaries are formed out of experiences of loss, separation, and distance (Schmidt Camacho 2008), children reestablish new emotional connections that change the meaning of "family" and their subjective experiences of family relationships over time (Fog Olwig 1999). While this demonstrates children's resilience, their shifting emotional ties also produce ambivalence for children, particularly when they are faced with the prospect of leaving Nicaragua and reuniting with mothers in destination countries.

Figure 1   *Selso's Family Drawing. (Managua, Nicaragua. November 11, 2009).*

This reformation of relatedness is seen in the kin terms children use to refer to their grandmothers. For example, Jeremy described his grandmother Norma this way: "Es mi mamá. Bueno es mi abuelita pero yo le digo mamá porque ella me crió" (She's my mom. Well, she's my grandma but I call her mom because she raised me). Since Norma has cared for him since he was just over a year old, now 11, Jeremy shares a strong affective tie with his "mamá Norma." Children use the affective term "mamá" to refer both to their grandmothers and to their mothers. Thus, siblings Vanessa and Selso call their grandmother "mamá Marbeya" and their mother "mamá Azucena." Eight-year-old Selso was born in Costa Rica but his mother brought him back to Nicaragua to be raised by his maternal grandmother. In the four years he has lived with her, his "mamá Marbeya" has become "como mi mamá" (like my mom), and his co-resident maternal aunts have also come to figure prominently in his sense of family belonging. This is illustrated in Figure 1, which is Selso's drawing of his family. Selso draws a picture of his house, and places his "tía Karla" (aunt Karla) and "tía Yesica" (aunt Jessica) inside, along with his "mamita" (grandmother Marbeya) and "papito" (grandfather; Marbeya's husband).

Like her brother Selso, 13-year-old Vanessa also imagines her family to include her maternal aunts, grandmother, and grandfather. As illustrated in Figure 2, Vanessa draws a picture of a small house in the background, and foregrounds the figures of her "mamita," "papito," and her "tía Lesbia" and "tía Karla" (aunts Lesbia and Karla). Notable in both children's drawings is that their migrant mother Azucena is not included. While this could be interpreted in different ways, it nonetheless suggests that when they are asked to think about who constitutes

Figure 2 *Vanessa's Family Drawing. (Managua, Nicaragua. November 11, 2009).*

their "family," Selso and Vanessa imagine those adults with whom they share a household and who they perceive as having primary roles in their caretaking. Vanessa affirmed that living with her grandmother is, "Como tener a mi mamá–mi mamita siempre me ha tenido como mi mamá, que ella me cuida" (Like having my mom—my mommy [Marbeya] has always been to me like my mom, she has taken care of me).

As these children's drawings show, in the years following mother migration, children's primary affective ties shift toward their grandmothers and other extended kin with whom they share a household. These caregiving reconfigurations in mother migrant families have significant repercussions for the imaginaries children form of migration; children's primary affective ties shift toward their grandmothers, connecting children to Nicaragua through these relations of care, while children's relations to mothers abroad grow more distant and troubled over space and time. It is important to note that the attachment children feel to grandmother caregivers depends on a number of factors, including the involvement of grandmothers in child caretaking prior to mothers' departures, the length of time since mother migration, the ongoing relational dynamics between mothers and their children, and the ways transnational families stay in touch over time and distance. However, across the families in my study, grandmother caregiving provides a source of continuity that may protect children from some of the more difficult emotional impacts of mother migration. One way this protection is achieved is by reinforcing a shared narrative that mother migration is a sacrifice made for the sake of children's well-being.

"Se Tuvo Que Ir": Children's Understandings of their Mothers' Migration

In this section, I show how children in Nicaraguan transnational families work to make sense of mother migration by drawing on cultural expectations for mothers' roles within family life. At times, children are able to accept mother migration as a necessary sacrifice made so that children themselves would be cared for using the money mothers send from abroad. In fact, for all the mothers in this study, migration was motivated primarily by economic push factors, namely, lack of job opportunities and relatively low wages in Nicaragua. When they first leave Nicaragua, mothers often tell children their departures are temporary, saying, "voy a volver pronto" (I'm coming back soon); however, over time, children come to realize that migration involves a more permanent reconfiguration of their family's life. It is in these moments that children express the ambivalence that shrouds their subjective experience of migration, yearning for their mother's return even if it means losing the economic benefits of remittances.

For example, nine-year-old Juliana tells me of her mother Manuela, "Se tuvo que ir para pagar unos bancos, tuvo que ir y trabajar allá y mandarle a mi abuela para darme de comer" (She had to leave to pay some banks, she had to go and work there and send my grandma [money] to feed me). Despite her young age, Juliana is aware of the complex dynamics structuring her mother's migration; namely, that Manuela was financially indebted and is currently working in Panama to pay off these debts and to send money back to her grandmother Olga for her own care. Still, Juliana feels ambivalent about her mothers' absence, often telling Olga that it is time for Manuela to return to Nicaragua.

Even as children make sense of mothers' migrations as a necessary sacrifice needed to "sacar adelante a la familia" (get the family ahead), their renderings of their mothers' departures reflect their sense of being suspended between life in Nicaragua and their mothers' lives abroad. For example, 11-year-old Laleska, who has a somewhat troubled relationship with her mother Karla, recognizes that "ella está trabajando allí para que yo estoy bien aquí" (she's working there so that I can be okay here). As we will see below, while Laleska can rationalize Karla's absence as a sacrifice for her welfare, Laleska also resents her mother's ongoing absence from her life (at the time of this study, Laleska and Karla had been separated for over ten years). For her part, 13-year-old Vanessa recalls asking herself why her mother would have left for Costa Rica over ten years previously: "Me preguntaba '¿porqué se fue?' y la respuesta que encontré es pues que tenía que ir para trabajar para que estudiáramos y porque necesitamos el dinero para vivir" (I asked myself 'Why did she leave?' And the answer I came up with is, well, that she had to leave to work so that we could study and because we needed money to live). Vanessa's response illustrates how children engage reflectively with the circumstances and consequences of their mothers' migrations, struggling

to make sense of migration as a response to mothers' need for work abroad in order to sustain families back home. In making these assertions about the economic necessity driving mother migration, children are drawing on narrative frames reinforced by their grandmothers. However, these shared rationalizations are precarious, and when confronted with the painful reality of mothers' ongoing absences, children must work to remind themselves that the economic benefits of migration are indeed worth the emotional costs.

For other children, it is more difficult to frame their mothers' migrations as economically necessary and thus migration represents a greater rupture to cultural expectations of motherhood. This is the case for Alexandra, 11 years old, whose mother Elizabeth migrated to Panama about six months before our interviews. Alexandra was being raised by her paternal grandmother and was one of three children in this study who shared a household with her father. That her father was gainfully employed and economically supportive of her and her mother left Alexandra feeling that her mother had "chosen" migration because she wanted to have the experience of living and working abroad, not because she "needed" to migrate. I would like to add an endnote here, if possible (thereafter renumbering subsequent endnotes). The footnote should read: "Parreñas (2005) argues that framing mother migration as a necessity rather than a choice reflects dominant patriarchal gender ideologies in the Philippines and may partly aid children in making sense of mother migration." As a result, Alexandra resented her mother and refused to say whether she wanted her mother to return to Nicaragua (as Elizabeth planned to do within a year).

In research on the psychosocial consequences of parent migration for Latino immigrant children in the United States, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco show that the "social and cultural framing" of the causes of migration influence children's subjective experiences (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001:67). In their study, children who perceived migration as a necessary response to their family's economic circumstances, and those who felt their migrant parents were making sacrifices for their own well-being, were less likely to feel neglected or abandoned (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001). According to my research, similar processes are at work for children in migrant sending families, who draw on cultural narratives for family life to make sense of mother migration as a necessary sacrifice for children's well-being. As long as transnational family life continues to fit within this cultural framing, children may be better able to cope with the potential adverse consequences of mother migration. Specifically, to the extent mothers uphold expectations to stay in touch and to economically support families back home, children may have less contentious relationships with their mothers (Fog Olwig 2003) and may be less likely to feel as though their mothers have "abandoned" them. Nevertheless, when these forms of transnational communication break down, children find

it more difficult to justify their mothers' ongoing absences using cultural tropes of sacrifice.

Staying in Touch: *Remesas* and the Complications of Transnational Communication

For children of mother migrants, the dynamics of remittances and transnational communication are central both to the maintenance of continuity in transnational family life and to the formation of children's ambivalent imaginaries of migration. From children's perspectives, remesas (remittances) matter not merely because they afford the purchase of material goods, but more importantly because they foster emotional ties with migrant mothers and thus sustain their imaginaries of migration (Baldassar 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Horton 2008; Levitt 1998). In other words, the receipt of regular remittances, phone calls, texts, e-mails, and Facebook messages distinguishes between mothers who "abandon" and those who remain "pendiente" (responsible for) children. Combined with children's understandings of the economic reasons pushing their mothers to migrate, and knowledge of mothers' difficult working conditions abroad, the receipt of regular remesas and communication helps children feel that their mothers are upholding cultural expectations to sacrifice for families' well-being.

The receipt of remittances depends on the stability of mothers' employment abroad as well as whether mothers have formed new families and had children in host countries (Menjívar and Abrego 2009). Both of these factors in turn are shaped by the duration of migration, which for families in this study varies from less than a year to more than a decade. Nonetheless, all the mothers discussed in this article have continued to send remesas and to maintain routine communication with children in Nicaragua.[12] This reflects what other scholars have shown: that mother migrants tend to maintain ties and send remittances over longer periods than father migrants (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001).

A priority for remittance expenditures in transnational families is children's education (Dreby 2010; Horton 2008). All the children in my study attend private schools with tuition paid by mothers' remesas. Grandmother caregivers remind children that doing well in school is part of their responsibility to their migrant mothers, who are working hard abroad in large part so that children can have access to better educational opportunities than they themselves had. Children respond to this encouragement by studying hard, and refer to their mother's sacrifices as a motivation for doing well and "pasando de grado" (passing onto the next grade). While other studies have found that children's educational outcomes suffer in the wake of parental migration (Gómez 2009; Lahaie et al. 2009), these studies have not adequately accounted for the potential protective effects of grandmother caregiving, which may support children's educational success. Furthermore, many

of the children discussed here embody an intergenerational ideal of sacrifice, as they respond to their mothers' sacrifices with their own "sacrifices" to study hard and achieve educational success.

As stated above, Nicaraguan children view the receipt of remesas and other material gifts as evidence that mothers are remaining pendiente. In interviews, children listed the gifts their mothers sent as a clear benefit of migration. For instance, Juliana enthusiastically told me about all the things her mother had sent since migrating to Panama: "Ay, muchas cosas: una camisa, un short, zapatos, jugetes, son muchas cosas, ni me acuerdo" (Ay, so many things: a shirt, shorts, shoes, toys, so many things, I can't even remember). Jeremy similarly talks with pride about things his mother has sent him from the United States, including "ropa, zapatos, Xbox, movies, y videojuegos" (clothes, shoes, Xbox, movies [DVDs], and video games). Similarly, Vanessa told me that the fact her mother has never failed to send remesas from Costa Rica to support her care helps her feel that, "nunca se ha olvidado de nosotros" (she has never forgotten about us).

Children's emphasis on the material gifts mothers send might be seen as evidence of what migration scholar José Luis Rocha has referred to as the broader "commercialization of culture" in sending countries of Central America (Rocha 2009). In other words, it is possible to interpret mother migration as involving a tradeoff between mothers' physical absence and children's material well-being, where remittances and material gifts sent by mothers from abroad partially substitute for mothers' physical absence from children's lives. Indeed, it has been argued that the "global imaginary of consumption" (Suárez-Orozco 2003), or "commercialized childhood" (Horton 2008), are primary motivations for—and justifications of—parent migration. However, this view situates children as acquisitive recipients of the goods mother migration affords and risks overlooking the affective dimension of remittances, or the way remesas partially connect mothers and children over transnational space and time while failing to compensate for children's ongoing desire to be physically close to their mothers.

Mother migrants also maintain communication with children and families back home through phone calls, Internet "chats" (with or without web cameras), text messages, e-mails, and Facebook.[13] Such technologies facilitate migrant mothers' attempts to "mother from a distance" (Parreñas 2001b). For sending families, receiving regular communication from abroad constitutes a central part of the distinction between mothers who abandon and those who are pendiente (responsible for them). Appadurai has argued that new forms of electronic media and modes of communication instantiate new forms of relationality in the contemporary globalized world (Appadurai 1996:3). In a similar vein, researchers of transnational family life have emphasized how new forms of communication facilitate continuity and intimacy between parents and children across national borders (Parreñas 2005; Wilding 2006). For the families in my study, however, contemporary

communications technologies embody a more ambivalent and contradictory set of meanings. While helping mothers stay in touch with children back home, and thus enabling some continuity in family relationships over time and distance, communication via cell phone and web chat also serves as an ambiguous reminder of mothers' absence and thus contributes to children's reluctance and ambivalence to engage in transnational communication.

At the time of this study, Jeremy was the only child who had access to a desktop computer connected to the Internet in his house. Jeremy talked nearly every other day with his mother Maria José via "chat" sessions using a web camera. In a sing-song tone indicating the routine nature of his transnational "chats," Jeremy told me, "She asks me how I am, if everything's OK, how I'm behaving at school, how I'm doing, if I'm studying, if this or if that." For Jeremy, communicating with this mother via the Internet has become a routinized and normalized part of his experience of transnational childhood. Possibly due to his relatively easier access to the Internet, Jeremy's case differs from other children in my study who express greater ambiguity about the effectiveness of transnational communication in providing continuity in mother–child relationships. Jeremy's migrant imaginary is more certain than other children in part because his family counts on resources such as an Internet connection in their home, but more importantly for the argument I am advancing here, Jeremy's grandmother Norma has consistently reinforced a narrative of mother migration that reminds Jeremy that his mother left for his benefit and so that he will one day join her in the United States.

For some children, phone calls or Internet chat with migrant mothers are actually painful reminders to children that their mothers are not "here," but "there." For example, Selso tells me that during every phone call with his mother Azucena, he asks her "cuándo va a venir" (when are you going to come [home]?). Twelve-year-old Katherin, whose mother migrated to Costa Rica five years prior to our interviews, similarly felt longing at the end of every phone call, and often ended by asking her mother "when are you coming home?" For her part, Vanessa views long-distance telephone calls with her mother in Costa Rica as inadequate substitutes for face-to-face communication:

> What we share between us is—it's what you are able to share over long distance. But also there are things that you can't [communicate]. Like telling her face-to-face, talking about things, that—for example, things that happen to me, that—for example, they said this at school and I didn't like it. And she—being able to have her opinion about things that happen to me.

Vanessa reflects on the limits of long-distance communication, which does not provide the sort of everyday, face-to-face, relational support that she longs to receive from her mother. As a result, "what we share" over transnational communication is never the same as what children can share with mothers who have not

migrated. Vanessa's reflection also encompasses a longing for a different form of communication with her mother, as she imagines sharing physical and emotional proximity unmediated by transnational distance.

As another example of the tensions involved with long-distance communication, children experience conversations with their migrant mothers as unwelcome reminders of growing emotional distance. Laleska's unwillingness to even answer her mother Karla's phone calls is an illustration of such affective disconnect. When I ask Laleska about her mother's calls, she poses her dilemma this way: "What good does it do me to tell her things, if she's so far away and by telephone, what can she do for me?" Laleska goes on to say, "I almost don't talk with her [mother Karla], I can't talk, something grabs me and I can't talk." Laleska's reluctance or inability to communicate complicates her mother's attempts to provide continuity and reflects Laleska's uncertainty about their present and future relationship.

Visits Home and the Ambivalence of "Reunification"

Another important influence shaping children's migrant imaginaries is the ability of mothers to visit Nicaragua and the future possibility of children's "reunification" with mothers in host countries. Immigration policies that make it costly and complicated for mothers to regularize their status in host countries and thus travel freely across national borders restrict mothers' ability to visit home and to proceed with reunification in a timely manner. Undocumented mothers are less likely than those with legal status to risk a trip home to Nicaragua, as such visits imply steep costs and the dangers of illicit border crossings. Also, mothers must regularize their own legal status in host countries before attempting to petition for legal visas for their children to join them. These processes take months or years and involve significant costs. At the time of this study, average wait times for family reunification visas in the United States were 12–24 months and costs averaged hundreds or even thousands of dollars in filing and associated legal fees (U.S. CIS). In recent years, Costa Rica and Panama have modeled their immigration polices on those in the United States, making regularization of migration status increasingly complicated and costly in these destination countries. Needless to say, these costs are often beyond the reach of many immigrants. For those mothers who do attempt to regularize their status and later petition for their children to join them, the complexity of immigration processes pose another challenge, as mothers try to explain such complications to children back home who wait months or years for immigration decisions, uncertain about their futures, with their present lives suspended between "here" and "there."

Migrants who are able to return to visit families in Nicaragua usually make these trips during the end of the year celebrations of "La Purísima" (a celebration

of the Virgin Mary), Navidad (Christmas), Año Nuevo (New Year), over Semana Santa (in mid-March), or for other special occasions. These visits are highly anticipated events for family members back home, and are symbolic reminders of both the emotional loss of mothers' initial departures and of the ongoing hope for potential future family reunification. The notion of "home" as a place of emotional attachment, a social space shared among family members (Constable 1999), is salient among the families in this study. Visits "home" to Nicaragua are exceptional opportunities for families to share time and physical intimacy, during which mothers take their children out "paseando" (going out)—shopping, sharing meals, and visiting extended family.

Despite their importance, migrants often have to cancel visits home due to economic constraints, lack of documentation, and changing immigration laws. Many of the children in this study anticipated return visits in December 2009, while in actuality only one mother migrant was able to visit home. Other mothers cancelled their trips because of job insecurity due to "la crísis" (the global economic crisis), job loss or insecurity in host countries, and the expense of return visits. For example, Juliana's mother Manuela was unable to return in December 2009 due to the cost of the trip from Panama, recently made more burdensome by a Costa Rican policy levying fines on those exiting and entering Costa Rican borders with expired visas. (Manuela would have to make the trip to Managua from Panama City by bus, passing through—and paying fines at—two Costa Rican border checkpoints.) Upon finding out that her mother could not visit, Juliana told me she felt "muy triste" (very sad), and, holding her arms out to her sides to imitate being in flight, Juliana said, "quisiera que podré ir a volar y agarrarme con ella" (I wish I could go fly and grab onto her).[14]

For children, mothers' absences are particularly salient at important life events. For example, both Laleska and Alejandra experienced their first menstruations without their mothers, so their grandmothers and aunts provided needed orientation about personal hygiene and helped explain the social significance of this biological event. At Laleska's first menstruation, it was not her mother Karla but her tía Noelia who showed her how to use sanitary pads. Laleska's grandmother Angela told me, "eso la golpeó, fue algo que quería compartir con su mamá" (this hurt her [Laleska]; it was something she wanted to share with her mother). The cultural expectation that menarche is a rite of passage into womanhood that should be shared between mothers and daughters goes unfulfilled in these cases, symbolizing the rupture mother migration invokes in children's lives. For both these girls, their experience of menarche strengthened their ties to their grandmothers and other female relatives, making them more ambivalent about the prospect of future reunification with their mothers.

Of all the children in this study, Jeremy appears to be the least ambivalent about his relationship with his mother and the most confident about his desire to rejoin

her in the United States. Before her visit in February 2010, Jeremy had not seen his mother Maria José since she emigrated ten years before. In an interview in the week before Maria José's visit, Jeremy talked with excitement about her arrival and imagined giving his mother a big hug when he greeted her at the Managua airport. Maria José was in the process of soliciting a residency visa for Jeremy, and had come to Nicaragua on this occasion with the intention of taking him back to New York with her. However, at an interview at the U.S. Embassy, immigration officials told Maria José that Jeremy could not leave Nicaragua until his residency petition was finalized (unbeknownst to Maria José, some additional bureaucratic steps remained incomplete). Thus, this visit was bittersweet for Jeremy, who enjoyed the time he spent with his mother, particularly because she "siempre me apapachaba y me daba besitos" (always caressed me and kissed me), but ultimately could not leave with her as they had planned. The visit did reinforce Jeremy's bond with his mother, so when he accompanied Maria José to the airport but could not board the plane with her, Jeremy told me he felt, "triste, claro!" (sad, of course!).

Even though Jeremy presents an imaginary of migration centered around his pending reunification with his mother in New York, he is also worried about the impact his leaving will have on his "mamá Norma." Maria José has reminded her son for years that leaving Nicaragua is the right thing for him, because, in Jeremy's words, "If I leave, well, I'm going to have a better future." Grandmother Norma has reiterated this narrative, encouraging Jeremy that rejoining his mother is best for him. Still, despite their support and encouragement, and Jeremy's own confidence about being able to succeed as a child migrant, he worries about leaving his mamá Norma behind. During our interview, when Jeremy talked about leaving his grandmother, his otherwise excited eyes turned downcast as he sat in atypical silence for a few moments before turning to me and saying, "it's OK, I'm going to visit her [Norma] during my vacations."

Figure 3 presents the picture Jeremy drew of his family, which highlights important dimensions of his migrant imaginary.

Jeremy portrays his house in Managua with a front gate that separates the house and its neat front yard from the sidewalk and dirt street outside. Inside, there is a large ceiba tree in Jeremy's backyard, home to the family's pet bird, which can also be seen pictured below the rope Jeremy has tied to one of the tree's branches. Also in the backyard is a used car tire—one of many that Jeremy's tío Michael has discarded for his children and Jeremy to play with. (Michael works as a taxi driver and lives with his wife and two young children in the same household compound.) Finally, our attention shifts to the rainbow Jeremy has pictured floating above the house, which seems to connect Jeremy (the stick figure) with Jeremy (his name) at the other end of the rainbow. Possibly, this represents Jeremy's sense of being suspended across transnational space, between "here" in Nicaragua and "there," in a possible future with his mother in New York. The airplane flying above the

Figure 3 *Jeremy's Family Drawing. (Managua, Nicaragua. March 10, 2010).*

entire scene illustrates Jeremy's imminent migration. Even though Maria José's recent visit to Managua did not result in his departure, Jeremy anticipates leaving Nicaragua for the United States in the near future and looks forward to that outcome.

Whereas Jeremy confidently anticipates reunification with his mother, Laleska is uncertain about leaving Nicaragua. Laleska's situation is illustrative of the tensions that emerge among migrant parents, caregivers, and children in transnational families around the possibility of reunification (Moran-Taylor 2008). Laleska has not seen her mother since Karla's last visit to Nicaragua over three years ago and—along with Laleska's refusal to talk to her mother over the phone—this causes grandmother Angela to worry about the growing emotional distance between Laleska and her mother. Although Karla told Laleska that she had begun processing her U.S. residency visa, it is actually unclear (both to Laleska and to this researcher) whether this is the case. At the start of my fieldwork, Angela told me

with confidence that Karla had submitted the visa petition for Laleska, and seemed to express that Laleska's departure was imminent. However, months later, toward the end of my fieldwork, Angela told me that she did not know whether Karla had actually begun the visa process. While at first it seemed Angela was changing her story based possibly on what she might have wanted me to believe (or what she herself wanted to believe), my interpretation of Angela's vacillation is that it aptly reflects the confusion and complications involved with the family reunification visa process.[15]

Given this backdrop of uncertainty, the fact that Laleska herself is ambivalent about whether she wants to emigrate to join her mother or stay in Nicaragua is understandable. Laleska summarizes her response to the prospect of "reunification" this way: "quiero ir, y no quiero ir" (I want to go, and I don't want to go). When I ask Laleska about the reasons she "wants to go," she lists meeting her younger siblings (born in the United States to Karla and Karla's U.S.-resident spouse; Laleska has only seen her three half-siblings in pictures) and reuniting with her mother. When I ask about the reasons she "doesn't want to go," Laleska says she does not want to leave her mamá Angela, her cousin Alexa (with whom Laleska lives in Managua), or her school friends. Laleska elaborates on her concern about leaving her grandmother in particular, saying she worries about how Angela will feel if she leaves her after so many years living together. In other words, Laleska's imaginary of migration is conflicted for she is uncertain about the decision of staying or going and feels both pulled by the idea of rejoining her mother but strongly tied to her family and everyday life in Nicaragua. Laleska's ambivalent feelings reflect her incredibly uncertain future—a future difficult to imagine. Laleska is unsure whether she will spend the rest of her childhood and adolescence in the comfort of her working-class Managua barrio surrounded by family and friends, or whether she will move to Miami and live with her mother, stepfather, and three half-siblings as an immigrant Latina child in the United States[16]. When I asked Laleska's grandmother who would make the final decision about Laleska's possible reunification with her mother in the United States, Angela told me she felt the decision should be left up to Laleska herself. However, it is unclear what role Laleska will have in determining whether or not she will go.

Concluding Comments: Children's Imaginary of Mother Migration

I have situated Nicaraguan children as actors in global social processes that marginalize family members "left behind," but I am also interested in how children engage with these social processes, possibly even in transformative ways (Quesada 1998). My attempt joins those of other migration scholars who are increasingly interested in seeing children as important actors in transnational processes (Coe

et al. 2011; Duque-Páramo 2012). As I have demonstrated, children understand the economic factors pushing their mothers to migrate, engage with remittances on material and affective levels, and respond to the tensions involved with transnational communication and the prospects for "reunification." Children draw on Nicaraguan cultural values for family life to help make sense of mother migration and enable them to frame migration as a means through which mothers remain "pendiente" (responsible for) children. Nevertheless, these narrative framings of migration as a necessary sacrifice for children's well-being run into tension alongside children's lived experiences of their mothers' migrations, which may be exacerbated over prolonged periods of mother absence. Along with the strong relational ties children form with grandmother caregivers in Nicaragua, cultural narratives thus become sources of both continuity and disjuncture in children's subjective experiences of transnational family life.

The imaginary that children form of migration is deeply uncertain and ambivalent. In part, these feelings result when the tensions and strains of transnational family life exceed the ability of children to make sense of mother migration using existing cultural frameworks. Children's migrant imaginary must be understood as encompassing the possibilities of change, transformation, and opportunity that migration offers, but it must also be discussed in relation to children's connection to family relationships and ties to their homes in Nicaragua. My findings thus differ from other recent studies of children of migrant parents, which have suggested that migration may reinforce children's sense of family belonging and continuity (Dreby and Adkins 2011). Instead, I find that globalization and transnational migration are potential sources of disruption and alterations in family forms and relationships (Schmalzbauer 2004). However, I also contend that children draw on cultural resources—central among these are the strong ties they form with grandmother caregivers and the shared narratives of migration they create—to face the challenges of transnational family life.

The title of this article reflects children's sense of being both "here" and "there." While this sense of liminality has been used to describe the experiences of migrants themselves (Chavez 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Horton 2009), this work shows that children "left behind" by global migration processes also experience their subjective sense of self, identity, and belonging as transformed by transnational processes. Thus, when Laleska says "quiero ir y no quiero ir" (I want to go and I don't want to go), she is expressing her sense of being suspended across time and distance; she has both a desire to rejoin her mother in the United States, but also a strong sense of connection, commitment, and belonging to her grandmother and her life in Nicaragua. While other children may appear more certain about reunification with migrant mothers, their everyday lived experiences of transnational life remain deeply ambivalent, as they negotiate the tensions around remittances, communications, and emotional ties to grandmothers that complicate

the prospect of their own migration. In other words, children's subjective experiences of migration are permeated with ambivalence, for they enjoy the material goods remittances afford, but would prefer their mothers were physically present; they desire to rejoin their mothers, but simultaneously fear leaving their grandmothers and extended families behind. In the face of these contending sentiments, children's migrant imaginaries are crafted out of the ambiguous emotional space between "wanting to go" and "not wanting to go."

To return to Jackson's argument, the migrant imaginary is a social, cultural, and subjective field wherein migrants struggle to become fully human, given the opportunities and constraints of migrant life. According to Jackson, the migrant imaginary:

> Constitut[es] an expression of the human condition that everywhere entails a perplexing indeterminacy between our confused longings, imaginings, and desires, on the one hand, and the external world on the other, and that affords us ways and means of realizing these longings and integrating them with the longings of others (Jackson 2007:134).

The "perplexing indeterminacy" of children's migrant imaginaries captures the constraints and possibilities of transnational family life and children's own longings, as well as the desires of their mothers, grandmothers, and other family members. Children's subjective experiences of migration also reflect both cultural values for family life in Nicaragua as well as the global political and economic processes pushing Nicaraguan mothers into transnational migration and complicating prospects for family "reunification." While their imaginaries of transnational migration reflect these structural processes, children also appear resilient and capable of engaging in the local, everyday struggles that help them create meaning and foster continuity in their lives—struggles that are very much part of the contemporary human condition.

Acknowledgments

Notes

[1] See Fog Olwig (2003) for a review of the literature on transnational migration theory in anthropology.

[2] The migration of Latin American women has resulted in what Jessaca Leinaweaver (2010:69) has referred to as a "care slot," or a void in caregiving not only for children but also for elderly parents who rely on adult daughters for care and support.

[3] By "undocumented" I mean that migrants lack the necessary documents to regularize their legal status in host countries. For many Nicaraguan migrants, the problem of documentation begins well before migration, as they may lack even the most basic documents of Nicaraguan citizenship, such as birth certificates and passports, which means obtaining legal documents in destination countries is all the more difficult.

[4] Many Nicaraguans arriving in the United States during the 1980s as a result of the political violence of the Contra War were able to take advantage of the Nicaraguan And Central American Adjustment Act (NACARA). Passed by the U.S. Congress in 1997, NACARA granted residency to some 55,000 Nicaraguans who had entered the country before December 1, 1995 (Rocha 2006).

[5] While precise data on the numbers of children of mother migrants in Nicaragua are impossible to come by, some estimates place the number at close to 500,000. Of these, it is estimated that possibly half are being cared for by a grandmother (Torres and Barahona 2004).

[6] Of course, we must be cautious about using such cultural ideal types to characterize gender as lived and practiced (see Gutmann 1996 for an excellent critique of the concept of machismo in Latin American studies). While space here limits my discussion of the gendered processes shaping the experiences of Nicaraguan transnational family life, my broader research project explores the cultural values and reconfigurations of caregiving following mother migration.

[7] For an account of how this uncertainty plays out for a young Honduran boy imagining his life with his mother in the United States, see Nazario (2007). I thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

[8] This research was approved by the UCLA IRB, project no. G09–04–043–01.

[9] Because my research was conducted with family members in Nicaragua, it is difficult for me to discern the extent to which there may be class division within these transnational families, such as that which Schmalzbauer (2008) has described for Honduran transnational families.

[10] In 12 of the study families, children are cared for by maternal grandmothers; in three families, children are cared for by paternal grandmothers. The three fathers who are involved in their children's lives are co-resident fathers and sons of the three paternal grandmothers.

[11] Whereas other studies have suggested children's estrangement from and even rebellion against caregivers in families of migrant parents (Gómez 2009; Moran-Taylor 2008), such dynamics are rare among the families in my study. In part, this may be due to a sampling bias inherent in my study of younger, school-age children and to my purposive selection of families where grandmothers are primary caretakers for children.

[12] On average, the grandmother caregivers in my study receive US$100 per month in remesas from mother migrants living abroad. The actual amount received depends on several factors, including mothers' length of stay, her economic and social circumstances in host countries, and whether mothers have had children and formed new families abroad.

[13] While widespread, the penetration of Internet technologies is far from universal in Nicaragua. Thus, only three of the children discussed here had used the Internet to communicate with their mothers at the time of this study.

[14] In fact, in December 2010, Manuela sent for Juliana to rejoin her in Panama; Juliana has lived there with her mother ever since.

[15]At the time of writing, Karla told me she was attempting to petition for Laleska to join her in Miami; however, Karla has several unresolved personal legal issues that may delay the processing of Laleska's visa petition.

[16]"See Leinaweaver (2013) for an investigation of the processes surrounding Peruvian adoption migration to Spain and how children become "Latino" in this process." If endnote is added, need to add this source to the references cited list as well: Leinaweaver, Jessaca. (2013). Adoptive Migrations: Raising Latinos in Spain. Durham: Duke University Press.

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