

# MIGRATION

## A EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

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Reports of the European Migration Centre

SPECIAL ISSUE  
FROM EMIGRATION TO IMMIGRATION  
TO TRANSMIGRATION?  
NEW RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON SPAIN  
Guest Editors: GUNTHER DIETZ / NADIA EL-SHOHOUMI

43/44/45

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*Cristina Sánchez-Carretero*

*Motherhood from Afar: Channels of  
Communication among Dominican Women  
in Madrid*

*This article explores the concepts of 'multiple motherhood' and 'social remittances' by looking at the ways in which binational families maintain their links to their countries of origin. Using an ethnographically-grounded case study on Dominican female migration to Madrid, the functions of several channels of communication are analysed, such as telephone, photographs, videos and gifts. These channels make the performance of motherhood in the distance possible, and, at the same time, constitute agency strategies to reach certain degrees of control in their children's daily lives when the mothers are not physically present. Pictures and video tapes are just two examples which allow for different and yet related genres of establishing connection and closeness.<sup>1</sup>*

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Text and image, intricately entangled in a narrative web, work in collaboration to tell a complicated story of loss and longing

Marianne Hirsch (1997, 4)

Nowadays it is possible to maintain strong family ties in multiple locations due to the decreasing duration and cost of transportation, communication, and the transfer of information and money. Various channels of communication that establish bridges between transnational families facilitate these ties. The case of Dominican families in Madrid clearly exemplifies these changes in mobility. Their paradigm cannot be considered in the light of traditional patterns in which migration is understood as leaving one place, and arriving at a destination point with a possible (although not probable) return. These processes have to be understood as mobility inside a fluid territorial imaginary, following the path opened by Basch, Schiller and Szanton-Blanc with their model of transnational community.<sup>2</sup>

While most migrants from the Dominican Republic moved to the United States,<sup>3</sup> large numbers of women from the south-western part of the country migrated to Spain. In the period up to 2000, Dominican migration to Spain was primarily that of female domestic workers, who formed migration networks, established upon kinship, friendship, and godmother relationships.<sup>4</sup> Families separated by spatial-temporal gaps are the normal pattern among Dominican first generation migrants in Spain. The fluidity in family relationships undermines the roles of the traditional households. It is very common to find grandmothers raising their grandchildren because their mother is in Spain. In addition, we find mothers who take their babies born in Spain back to the Dominican Republic, stay with them there for a while and then leave again for the Iberian Peninsula, while their babies remain behind in the grandmother's household.

Here, I would like to extend the concept of bi-national society developed by Luis E. Guarnizo. According to this author, cyclical mobility can be considered the norm among Dominicans in the US, which – among other things – results in the emergence of multinuclear households. Therefore, “the prevailing belief that migrants’ spatial mobility is definitive and falls into a rigid settler-sojourner dichotomy” needs to be reevaluated (Guarnizo: 1994, 76). Some of them are, indeed, ‘circular migrants’, a term coined by Joseph Fitzpatrick for the case of Puerto Ricans in the US (1975). In addition to the existence of multinuclear households, I would like

to stress the importance of the viability of multiple motherhood by sharing family reproduction – as well as assuming its production – from abroad.

In this article, I will present some of the narrative channels used by Dominicans in Madrid to illustrate the changes in the creation of images regarding space and place, in order to keep their multi-sited households, and, at the same time, construct themselves (or new aspects of their mobile self). Narrating is the most fundamental communicative means of maintaining order within chaos and making sense of experience. Personal narrative is a powerful analytical device for the study of a dislocated population. Narratives are, indeed, the linking threads that make it possible to maintain communication in the diaspora<sup>5</sup> as well as providing both a place to live and meaning (Sørensen: 1999; Rapport: 1999). Long distance calls and video tapes are just two examples which allow for different and yet related genres to establish connections and closeness; as well as control of noise, distortions, and lack of connection in some cases. As Dell Hymes states, a “focus on channels in relation to other components entails such functions as have to do with the maintenance of contact and control, and noise, both physical and psychological in both cases” (Hymes: 1972, 37). The diasporic situation may use different media of communication to the face-to-face situation, within which the ethnography of communication was developed. Nevertheless, paying attention to how people organise their speech opportunities and how they structure them remains highly important, especially as new ‘speech genres’ tend to emerge.

The concept of social remittances is a useful tool successfully applied by Peggy Levitt to the study of a transnational community from the Dominican Republic (Miraflores) displaced to the Boston area (Levitt: 1999; 2001). Social remittances are “the ideas, practices, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving to sending communities” (Levitt: 1998, 76; 2001, 11, 54). Levitt sees the basis of the creation of locality in social remittances that work as a two-way process, being the “tools with which ordinary people create global culture at the local level” (Levitt: 2001, 11). The author mentions some of the communication channels that I include here: “Social remittances are carried by migrants and travellers, or they are exchanged by letter, video, or phone. They travel through well-marked pathways – be they formal or informal organizational structures or interpersonal exchanges between individuals” (Levitt: 2001, 77). Levitt, however, does not consider narratives as the main vehicle for the delivery of these social remittances that, in the

end, form the basis of stereotypes, and the collective memory of the migration process.

### By Telephone and Other Waves

The main vehicle transmitting narratives among the Dominican diaspora is the telephone. During the 1980s call rates were higher, but since the late 1990s small communication businesses have appeared all around Madrid, and telephone calls are now cheaper than ever before. Families reunite by oral means, their voices being the main vehicle for exchanging experience. Oral communication influences the ways in which the 'other life' is recreated, because contextual references are substituted by 'the imagination of the distance'. Business centred on telephone calls started with the use of cellular phones for long distance calls. At the Aravaca square in Madrid, the meeting place *par excellence* for Dominicans until the late 1990s, it was common to see Dominican men with cell phones offering them to others to call the Dominican Republic for a cheaper rate than public telephones.<sup>6</sup> The increase in migration in Spain and the end of the state's Telefónica monopoly on telecommunication accelerated the appearance of telephone booth businesses (*locutorios*), as well as of long-distance telephone cards that are currently one of the most common ways to call abroad.

The telephone remains the primary carrier of narratives for keeping track of transnational households. It facilitates motherhood while being separated from the children. Whenever a problem arises, a call to the mother is the most direct way to know what to do. As Levitt states, "cheap telephone rates and airplane fares makes it easy to believe that parenting across borders is possible" (Levitt: 2001, 78). Phone calls have, in many cases, taken the place of hand-written letters:

Receiving a letter every two weeks, however, is not the same as being able to pick up the phone at any moment of the night or day. A closeness arises just from knowing that you can be in touch immediately if you so desire. It also gives migrants the ability to be involved in the day-to-day decisions of the household they leave behind (Levitt: 2001, 23).

There used to be a saying, *si te va bien, escribe* (if things go well, then write), that has now been transformed into *si te va bien, llama* (if things go well, then call), which can be interpreted as a censorship device to let stories of success arrive while filtering out non-successful experiences. Patricia Pessar dedicates a section of her book, *Visa for a Dream* to the communication re-established after the person

who has migrated gets a job and calls back to the Dominican Republic (Pessar: 1995, 14-17). However, in the case of the families I met, telephone calls are frequent from the beginning, without waiting for any economic advancement.

Motherhood is possible thanks to telephone connections. The group discussion in the Aravaca cultural centre that took place on October 15, 2000 was dedicated to the relationships between mothers and their children being raised by the migrants' sisters or mothers in the Dominican Republic. In the course of the conversation there was unanimity with regard to what a 'good mother' is supposed to do: send money and, more importantly, give good advice and keep their children's trust in them. In the women's statements, the telephone appeared as the main vehicle for continuing motherhood duties from abroad: "Even if it is through the phone, one has to give them love and affection... I carry them in my mind, in my heart. I don't even sleep at night thinking about them." "We're good mothers – even if we are not with them... because we're here because of them... trust and advice are more important than money. When we're abroad, we have to give them advice on the phone, because we're not there." The use of phones enables mothers to enter into daily activities and to be part of decision-making processes. In addition, calls are also the most common medium for keeping control of the 'destination' of the remittances. The subject of control via telephone came up repeatedly in conversations about the situation of the families. In order to be sure that the remittances are spent in the ways determined by the sender, that is to say, the controlling aspects of the productive forces, the act of talking to different receivers of the remittances is essential. For instance, Ana Rosa – who has been working in Madrid since 1989 and has achieved a publicly accepted 'successful migrant experience' – talked to her husband weekly on the phone in order to check how the remittances were used. Afterwards she talked to each of her four daughters. Later, during her visits every two years, she could satisfy herself as to the use of the remittances (her daughters' education, building a house, a truck for her husband for work, medicine, etc).

Motherhood and telephone lines appear to connect lives which are geographically divided. Even politicians use the equation by which the agency of a mother is not annulled by distance – in part thanks to the possibility of immediate communication via telephone. The example explored by Patricia Pessar, in which the first Dominican New York City councilman, Guillermo Linares (elected in 1991), used a letter written by his mother from the Dominican Republic as propaganda

to encourage the New Yorkers to vote for him, is of particular interest. In the letter, she said that she would not be able to stay for the vote but that the phone lines would connect her:

As a mother of nine children and ten grandchildren, I have had many occasions to be proud in my life. But never have I felt as proud as I do at this moment. Next Thursday, my son Guillermo will have the opportunity to become the first Dominican to serve as a member of the New York City Council... I will be waiting for the phone call to hear the good news. Please, remember to vote for Guillermo Linares... You will have a member of the City Council who will make you proud. And you're going to contribute to the phone call from Guillermo to his mother that will be very, very special! (cited in Pessar: 1995, 75–6).

## Presents

Other vehicles of narratives (in addition to airwaves) used to shorten the transatlantic bridges are the objects mailed, brought or sent back home in each of the return trips either by the migrants themselves, by other family members or friends. Every single object that decorates the houses I visited (and stayed at) in multinuclear families in the Dominican Republic is linked to a narrative (as is the case with most objects of memory that surround us). Hence, the ethnographer interested in family tales is told stories that bloom in different circumstances. While being introduced to the family in question he/she learns about the solid financial base of relatives living abroad: “Look at the wall-clock my daughter sent, it’s beautiful and expensive,” or the bad situation on the island: “The clock doesn’t work because we cannot even afford to buy batteries.” In this section, carriers of narratives are viewed from two perspectives: the ways of delivering narratives (including inducers of narratives) and objects that can be considered to embody narratives themselves.

Preparing the suitcase with presents for the family can take a lot of time and economic effort; it is usually an activity that is planned from the moment a return trip has been organised. Cholo – who has been working in Madrid since 1992, a year after his sister Ladys had already established herself in Aravaca – clearly describes his feelings regarding the suitcases full of presents:

People always expect you to bring them something, because they are not used to... for instance, all people, when they travel, they are used to bringing a lot of suitcases



for their friends, their brother, their uncle, cousin...you know? And what that friend does not understand, or what that uncle and that cousin do not understand is that there are times, when you cannot bring anything, and that flying with so many suitcases is very uncomfortable. When you get there and don't give anything to anybody... well, nobody talks to you – they criticise you, "Look at this guy, he spends ten years in Spain and when he comes back, he comes with empty hands." So, how would you feel? You'd feel terrible, because you are going to see your friends, your family, and you're excited thinking they are going to receive you with open arms, and when you get there, you feel... alone! Nobody to talk to, to go out with to the same places you used to go. And if you go to a bar to have a beer, you have one and have to pay for ten, because there're three or four friends over there who are asking you to pay for their beers. Just because someone is abroad, everybody thinks that he has a lot of money, and they are not aware of how much a round-trip ticket is.<sup>7</sup>

Levitt presents the same uncomfortable situation of being objectified in the case of Dominican migration to the US:

A vicious circle has been set in motion. Initially, the gifts non-migrants received from the United States awed them. They felt deeply indebted and grateful to their benefactors. Now, many take these monies and gifts for granted. They feel they cannot get by without the beauty supplies, clothing, or food that they regularly receive. Migrants are considered failures if they arrive home without a suitcase full of gifts for everyone, yet many of them are tired of catering to this 'spoiled child' they have created (Levitt: 2001, 88).

The disappointment induced by not getting gifts from the visitors is well illustrated in the story of the 'lost suitcase', in which a mother who was working in Madrid travelled back home after not having visited the Dominican Republic for six years. Once she arrived, she could not find her suitcases at the airport and her daughter simply said, "So, why did you come then?" This story, told at the Aravaca Cultural Centre, clearly exemplifies the commodification of the mother:

There was this woman... she never went back home since she had left, and always sent money back, and when she visited her children for the first time [after migrating] ... her suitcases did not arrive, and her eldest daughter asked her "*Mummy*, where is your luggage?" "It hasn't arrived yet!" "So, why did you come then?"<sup>8</sup>

About fifteen women nodded and some commented, “Yes, that happens, I know... it’s sad but that happens!” The disadvantage of motherhood from afar – or ‘multiple motherhood’ as Levitt describes it – is the lack of the mother’s physical presence. The children, then, exercise a certain power in the household by controlling the gifts and goodies provided by the migrant worker. The remittances and gifts can objectify the figure of the mother, who is reduced to the ‘provider from afar’. Remittances can be included in this channel of communication. After all, they are one of the main reasons for leaving home, and the amount and frequency of remittances convey multiple meanings for the receivers. Sending a member of the family to Spain is a household strategy and requires the investment of the family savings to fund the migration project (Gregorio Gil: 1998, 118; Gallardo Rivas: 1995, 78–79). In many cases, the financial support of migrant members of the family who are abroad is indispensable to the process of sending other relatives and contributes to the well-studied migration chain (Grasmuck and Pessar: 1991, 12–16; Massey et. al.: 1987). The expression “I benefited from a daughter who is in Spain” appears frequently in Dominican migration narratives. It means, “A daughter who is in Spain sends me remittances.” Mina, for instance, who has four daughters in Spain but has never left the Dominican Republic herself, expresses the relationship with her daughters in this way: “I’ve never visited Spain, I have four children over there, I benefited from two, but nothing from the other two – do you understand me? Because they do not take care of me”.<sup>9</sup>

The expression “*yo fui quien la mandé*” (I was the one who sent her over there) or “*yo fui quien la traje*” (I was the one who brought her here) also appears regularly in conversations about ways of entering Spain and is attached to reproaches regarding the lack of gratitude. Gregorio Gil also recounts a case in which a Dominican man was complaining about his wife’s behaviour in Spain, demanding control over her “because I was the one who sent her” (Gregorio Gil: 1998, 117). Gratitude is expressed in the form of presents or remittances, if the sending person is in the Dominican Republic, or in the form of keeping in contact and returning favours, if the sending person is in Spain. In addition to covering the expenses of the trip, ‘sending’ somebody can imply participating in any of the paper-related aspects of the migration process.

The necessity of contributing to the household economy appears in all of the life stories I recorded from Dominican women in Madrid. Respecting the demands of their families and, in many cases, the expectations in terms of reciprocity can cause serious family disruptions. The Love-Money-Distance triangle is reinterpreted in

the narratives about reciprocity as: Sacrifice-Blackmail-Distance. Those living and working abroad consider their migratory situation as a sacrifice they made in order to raise their children and feed their parents. At the same time they are blackmailed by their families back home into constantly sending more remittances and presents, since those who remained on the island interpret their intervention or initiative in having sent the person in question to Spain as their own sacrifice.

### Pictures

Sometimes, the objects sent from abroad are pictures illustrating the new life in Madrid, and, from time to time, a few written words on the back accompany the photographs. Narratives in other media, such as pictures, are rarely studied. Altagracia's apartment in downtown Madrid is decorated with the photographs of her six children and grandchildren. None of them live in Spain; her eldest daughter has raised the youngest since 1993, when Altagracia started to work in Madrid. One day when we were recording part of her life story, Altagracia raised her head and said while looking at her family:

In one way I'm not lucky, but in others, you bet I am.... because God gave me six healthy children. They never had to be sent to hospital, they have never been sick. And you know, that is good luck, more than being a millionaire, because over there, you can imagine how contaminated it is sometimes. And even if I wanted, I couldn't have been with my children as it should be, because I would have had to work... and look! Here they are! [we remain silent while looking at the pictures]<sup>10</sup>

Pictures are sent back and forth telling narratives of ritual markers around the calendar year (birthdays, pilgrimages, holidays), marriages, funerals, or festive events such as picnics, concerts, or a meal with some friends or relatives. Marianne Hirsch, in *Family Frames* (1997) argues that all family photographs are composite visual texts, or, as W. J. T. Mitchell<sup>11</sup> prefers to define them 'imagetexts', "whose readings are narrative and contextual but which also, in some ways, resist and circumvent narration" (Hirsch: 1997, 271).<sup>12</sup> Here I am interested in the narrative act of transforming "pieces of cardboard" into detailed stories that connect lives separated by continents and generations<sup>13</sup> (Hirsch: 1997, xii).

In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1969), Walter Benjamin analyses how the camera can expose a network of looking, otherwise invisible or unconscious. Displaying cohesion and being an instrument of togetherness, photographs reproduce the family image adopted by the West, they both “chronicle family rituals and constitute a prime objective of those rituals” (Hirsch: 1997, 7). When Ladys, Cholo’s sister, had a baby in Madrid in 2000 one of the first things she invested in was a studio photograph to be sent to the Dominican Republic. This picture created the illusion that it was a transcription of the real. Ladys prepared herself and her daughter to represent the visual narrative of happiness and success, even though being an unemployed single mother was the most difficult situation she had had to face. Anthropologist Nicole Constable mentions photographs as a medium in communication networks among Filipina workers in Hong Kong with relatives in the Philippines: “These photographs, along with letters and audio tapes, make up an important part of the communication network with relatives back home. Photographs also help to create and perpetuate the image that life in Hong Kong is happy and glamorous” (Constable: 1997, 168). The ‘happy and glamorous life’ shown in pictures constitutes a key element in the social remittances sent to the rest of the family.

Photographs can be located in the contradiction between the idealisation of the family and the lived reality. As Hirsch writes:

Since looking operates through projection and since the photographic image is the positive development of a negative, the plenitude that constitutes the fulfilment of desire, photographs can more easily show us what we wish our family to be, and therefore what, most frequently, it is not (Hirsch: 1997, 8).

The ways of looking at family pictures imply a particular ‘familial gaze’, defined historically and culturally – while the camera and the family album are instruments of this familial gaze (Hirsch: 1997, 11). An album is one of the first gifts sent after migrating. Santa, Ladys’ mother, has an album with the pictures sent by her three daughters and her son: “Cholo doesn’t send that many pictures. You know how men are... but look, this is my Lainis, poor thing. She was so pretty and good, a good mother, a good daughter and a good sister.” Santa points to the wall where she has a larger copy of the same picture that shows Lainis – her deceased daughter, who passed away in Spain – standing in a bedroom, next to a large mirror. Behind her, a wall covered from corner to corner with white satin curtains is to be seen. “I made a larger framed copy of this one, so she is always with me.” The album has brief written descriptions at the margins of the plastic auto-adhe-

sive sheets written by her daughters from Spain: "This is auntie's apartment in Prosperidad. Love, Ladys and Lainis." Both daughters appear wearing their best clothes, lying in a bed with teddy bears, standing in front of a large mirror or in the living room with their aunt.

The indexical quality<sup>14</sup> of photographs (like a footprint and the feet) is perceived as an authentication of the life abroad. Therefore, the ways of representing the self in pictures communicate, (1) the image one has of oneself; (2) the image one wants to be transmitted; (3) the assumptions of what is 'a proper image of the immigrant abroad'; and (4) the assumptions of what the other will read when looking at the picture. The exoteric/esoteric factors (Jansen: 1965) can be applied here to the act of sending/receiving pictures, and the equivalent would be the four levels described above.

### Videotaping: Dance, Food and Videotapes

Another vehicle in diasporic communication, which is part of what I have called 'visual narratives' (and what other authors such as Mitchell and Hirsch call 'imagetexts'), is the homemade videotape. Images are shown in public spaces (in addition to more private viewing of the tapes). In Madrid, one can find Dominican restaurants, bars and discos in Aravaca, Cuatro Caminos, Usera, Campamento etc. – that is, practically, in every area where Dominicans live. These places provide a variety of services: customers can eat, drink, dance, and, of course, chat (despite the high volume of the music). Moreover, a television occupying a prominent place, usually set on a platform located high up on one of the walls, is used to show videos brought back from the Dominican Republic. Any image will do, as long as it shows the Dominican Republic or Dominican landscapes. The simultaneity of music (usually bachata or merengue) and image is also common on the island. Since TV and stereos do not exclude each other, but rather are simultaneous pieces of equipment, it is very common to spend time in a bar watching TV and, at the same time, listening to music. Audio and visual consumption are complementary, although one has to take class and contextual factors into account. In La Cueva, the most famous bar and restaurant among Dominicans in Aravaca, the TV is usually turned on on Sunday and Thursday evenings. When 'fresh videos' arrive from Santo Domingo, they are played again and again so anybody who passes by can

see them. During my trip to the Southwest Dominican Republic, I usually used my video camera, upon which people asked me if I was going to show the tapes in Aravaca. First I thought, that the purpose of the question was to double-check the privacy of the recordings (since I always explained that I was using them for research purposes), but I soon realised it was the opposite: an image is considered better than a thousand words, and the 'visual narratives' allow the transgression of spatial limits, bringing the 'there' to 'here' more intuitively. As a researcher I have used the video camera as a carrier of narratives from one side to the other diaspora side. I have recorded baptisms and birthday parties in Madrid, which have been watched back in the Dominican Republic, and multiple celebrations, funerals, and textual messages, which have been shown in Dominican bars and homes in Madrid.

The content of visual narratives varies from excursions to family celebrations, including weddings, New Year's Eve parties, voodoo ceremonies, pilgrimages, and, sometimes, funerals.<sup>15</sup> These images feed the narratives developed in the context of their visual reproduction. The frontier between public and private becomes blurred to incorporate images that tell stories – which is the reason for the paradoxical expression "visual narrative". However, in these images the words of the storyteller are relegated to the background. They do not disappear, but rather are transferred to another level, triggering new oral narratives among the audience watching the videotapes. The same channel of communication has been pointed out by researchers such as Patricia Pessar or Peggy Levitt in the case of Dominican migration to the US. Among the topical choices that are recorded on video, Pessar includes "family rites of passage, such as marriages and baptisms that are videotaped to circulate between New York and the Dominican Republic. And electronic media help Dominican entrepreneurs manage businesses back home while continuing to reside in New York" (Pessar: 1995, 69). Levitt also includes this communicative technology as one of the main ways of sharing experiences:

This ability to share life's important occasions also keeps people connected to one another in unprecedented ways and reinforces their ties to one another. Furthermore, it allows migrants and nonmigrants to see how the other lives (...) This ability to visually move around in and explore the background of the scenes that earlier nonmigrants saw, if at all, in static photographs brings migrants and nonmigrants' worlds closer together in unparalleled ways (Levitt: 2001, 24).

Messages in a video recording are addressed to specific members of the family, but always bear in mind that the prospective audience might be larger and

unknown. When a family-recorded Dominican video is shown in a bar in Madrid, some people might know the people who appear in the event, but others will not recognise any of them. Some will look at them trying to decipher what they are saying, and others will continue with their activities without directing a glance to the TV monitor.

Showing these videos at home is a different practice with the same communication channel. Whether watched in groups or individually, the oral part of the visual text is carefully listened to at home. Ladys, for instance, watched videotapes of drumming ceremonies (*palos*) when her grandfather passed away and she could not return home for the funeral. Therefore, videos can also be employed in the diaspora to attend mourning situations.

### Conclusions

Narrating is the most fundamental act in communicative events. Every piece of information, image, or representation of the self might be cocooned in a story, in which multiple voices can be heard. In *Visa for a Dream*, Patrica Pessar asks why the image of the unsuccessful immigrant is not very common in the Dominican Republic and how the stereotype of the American dream still works, even though the statistics say that one third of Dominican Americans live under the US poverty level (Census 2000). The same imbalance between the bad situation described by Dominicans in Madrid and the Spanish dream described by the non-migrant population is reflected in Dominican-Spanish social remittances. This makes it interesting to locate the kind of filters employed in the narratives and images that arrive back to the island. The different strategies for filtering the discourses that reach the non-migrant population can be divided into groups depending on the direction and intention of what is censored. These images are social remittances in themselves, as they are part of the normative structures – one of the three kinds of social remittances, together with systems of practice and social capital, described by Levitt (2001, 59).

I have focused on the channels of communication employed to deliver narratives as a means to facilitate motherhood while being separated from one's children. Multiple motherhood, then, is possible in the diaspora with limitations, because

it does not always have desirable effects on the relationship between the migrant mother and her children. Motherhood from afar is a duty shared with the physically present 'mother' left in charge (grandmothers, sisters, or even, as in the case of Altagracia, daughters). Women perform the role of the productive force in their household. The fact that they undertake this traditionally male function does not mean, however, that they have changed roles – which indeed would be a logical corollary. It is rather the opposite, as demonstrated in studies by Gregorio Gil on Dominican female migration to Spain (Gregorio Gil: 1998, 257–267) and Iris Duarte on domestic workers in the Dominican Republic (Duarte: 1984, 199).<sup>16</sup> Part of these survival strategies consists in the assimilation by women of both the productive and reproductive work in the Dominican Republic as well as in Spain. As female interviewees expressed on several occasions during my fieldwork, they were “the man and the woman at the same time”; “Who I’m gonna leave them with? How? If I’m their mom and dad, their *pai* and *mai*.”

Motherhood is realised from afar because daily decisions related to the children’s lives are taken transnationally due to the immediacy of current channels of communication. ‘Transnational life’ is not an empty ‘post-modern etiquette’, as many anti-transnationalism scholars describe it (Sahlins: 2002; Friedman: 2002), but rather a daily experience for transnational families. Various studies criticise the transnational approach for its ‘happy-ending’ globalising perspective, while rejecting essentialising positions. Some of these studies achieve empowering conclusions but others acknowledge the reproduction of gender and class inequality (Levitt: 2001, 13–14).

Various forces that reproduce inequality are narrated in terms of money, love, and distance; vertices of a triangle located at the base of this transnational community. However, frictions arise in each of these vertices, and the love-money-distance triangle is reinterpreted in the narratives about reciprocity as sacrifice-blackmail-distance. Sending remittances, one of the primary sources of income for the Dominican Republic, implies a sacrifice for most of these women who have to live on low salaries – a sacrifice which is expressed as a response to the demands made by the families who remain behind. Although in many cases their hard work is acknowledged on the island, in others the stereotype is that “those who want to work hard would go to the US”. The image of the sacrificing mother stands in sharp contrast to the general image of prostitution that is attached to Dominican women working in Spain. The statement made by Gladys about children’s arguments in her hometown in the Dominican Republic is very striking: “Because



when a child quarrels with another child, you know what he says? ‘Your mom is a whore in Spain!’”

The re-creation of the self and the ways of inscribing locality are related to the chronotopes perceived in transnational situations. The possibility of continuing relationships in different places, on the one hand, and the creation of a multi-sited collective imaginary for the locality, on the other, could indicate a change in paradigm (in the Kuhnian sense) in relation to ways of imagining new cartographies facilitated by the open channels of communication that enable narratives to circulate in this fluid context. When transportation and communication technologies changed in the early twentieth century, many statements were made regarding the annihilation of time and space and the ways in which this “kept migrants close to their homelands” (Levitt: 2001, 23). However, it seems that there is now a fundamental difference in communication modes and immediacy. Keeping both feet in both worlds is definitely not new, but there are clear differences that might constitute a new paradigm based on transnational participation in family events, decisions, and politics. However, drawing on Guarnizo and Smith (1998), the new images of territories do not imply the idea that those who migrate live in an third imagined, transnational space. They are anchored in particular experiences of locality, “though their daily lives often depend upon people, money, ideas, and resources located in another setting” (Levitt: 2001, 11), narration being a fundamental mechanism in the construction of locality (Rapport: 1999). De-territorialised cultural practices or shrinking spaces, as Appadurai (1996) and Augé (1993) suggest, were not found, but rather multiple localities anchored in various places and firmly rooted in localising practices.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, this transnational life is possible thanks to the vehicles that make communication in the diaspora possible. Locality, therefore, is not based on selecting one place over the other, but on creating various places called ‘home’, which, in some cases, can be transnational.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> All the narratives presented in this article were recorded during my dissertation fieldwork in Madrid and the Dominican Republic between 1999 and 2001. I would like to thank the Latin American Migration Project and the Institute of North American Studies for their financial support during my research. In 2001, I also received a grant linked to the research Project, *La cultura popular en el Madrid de hoy: folklore y globalización*,

directed by Dr. Carmen Ortiz García (Comunidad de Madrid 06/0086/2000). A first draft of the ideas developed in this article was presented at the Seventh International Congress of International Society for Ethnology and Folklore, Budapest, 2001. All the names of the interviewees have been changed.

- <sup>2</sup> Basch et al. define transnationalism in relation to migration as the “processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch et al.: 1994, 6). The transnational migration approach, particularly of Basch et. al., has been criticised because of its non-historical perspective and ambiguous definitions (Grosfoguel and Cordero-Guzmán: 1998, 364). Grosfoguel and Cordero-Guzmán suggest that “the transnational migration literature needs to go beyond the nation-state and take more seriously the world-system as the unit of analysis” (1998, 364).
- <sup>3</sup> The 2000 US Census does not help to clarify the quantitative importance of Dominicans in the US. The current figure (in the census) is 764,495. However, according to Castro and Boswell, the number should be 1,014,879 (Castro and Boswell: 2002, 5) and according to Logan, 1,121,257 (Logan: 2001, 6). The difference between the census and the estimates is due to the “Other Hispanic” option. The number investigated without including any specification reaches six million, and should be distributed among the different Hispanic groups. In May 2003, the census released its own estimates making use of additional information on people’s country of origin and reported ancestry, estimating the number of Dominicans at 999,561 (Cresce and Ramírez: 2003). For information on Dominican migration to the US see Glenn Hendricks (1974), who wrote the first monograph dedicated to the topic, as well as Levitt (1999; 2001), Guarnizo (1994), Grasmuck and Pessar (1991), and Georges (1990). The case of Dominican migration to Spain has been explored by Carmen Gregorio Gil (1998), Gina Gallardo Rivas (1995), Yolanda Herranz (1996), and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero (2002). The comparative work on Dominicans in the US and Spain by Ninna Nyberg Sørensen (1997) is particularly interesting.
- <sup>4</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s – the decade in which Dominican migration to Spain rose dramatically – most immigrants entered the country as tourists, because until 1993 no visa was required to enter Spain. Later on, the highest number of entries took place through work and resident permits facilitated by members of the families who were already on Spanish territory. In the last two years the situation has changed again and the majority of those coming to Spain for the first time enter the country by the system of *reunificación familiar* (family reunion), which logically increases the number of children and husbands.
- <sup>5</sup> The term ‘diaspora’ was used until the late 1960s to refer to Jews, Greeks, and Armenians, and later to the African diaspora. After that date, many authors started to talk about diasporas instead of dispersions of peoples. As Tötölyan, the editor of the journal *Diaspora*, points out, “where once were dispersions, there now is diaspora” (Tötölyan: 1996, 3). The overuse of the term ‘diaspora’ to designate any migrant/displaced group of people has been criticised. In reshaping the scholarly use of ‘transnational communities’

and 'diaspora', I follow Levitt's reasoning: "Transnational communities are the building blocks of diasporas that may or may not take shape. Diasporas form out of transnational communities spanning sending and receiving countries and out of the real or imagined connections among migrants from a particular homeland who are scattered throughout the world. If a fiction of congregation takes hold, then a diaspora emerges. Dominicans who identify themselves as belonging to a diaspora might be transnational community members or isolated individuals who, wherever they are, share a sense of common belonging to a homeland where they are not" (Levitt: 2001, 15).

- <sup>6</sup> At the Corona Boreal Square in Aravaca during the summer of 1999, I was able to observe various owners of cellular phones providing other Dominicans with telephone service. By the following year, however, this type of business had ceased.
- <sup>7</sup> Cholo, tape T8: 11/9/00. "Siempre esperan, la gente siempre espera que les lleves algo, porque no está acostumbrado..., por ejemplo, es que todos los que viajan están acostumbrados a llevar montones de maletas a los amigos, al hermano, al tío, al primo, sabes, entonces lo que ese amigo no entiende y lo que ese tío y el primo no entienden es que hay momentos en que tú no puedes llevar nada, y que viajar es incómodo cuando vas con muchas maletas. Cuando vas allí y no le das nada a nadie, pues no te habla nadie, [...] no te hablan, te critican 'mira éste, éste se pasa diez años en España y cuando viene, viene sin nada'. Entonces, cómo te sentirás, te sientes mal, porque vas a ver a tus amigos, a tu familia, y vas entusiasmado que crees que te van a recibir con los brazos abiertos, cuando llegas allí pues te sientes... solo, sí ya no tienes a nadie con quién hablar, con quien ir a los sitios que ibas antes y si vas a tomarte una cerveza a un sitio, te tomas una y tienes que pagar diez cervezas porque hay tres o cuatro, cuatro amigos por ahí que empiezan a pedir para que tú pagues, claro sólo porque estás fuera y viajas creen que llevas muchísimo dinero, e ignoran lo que cuesta el billete de ida y vuelta y así ya..."
- <sup>8</sup> Group session 1, tape 10:15/10/00: "Hay una señora que ella siempre estaba por aquí, cómo se llamaba? [...] ella no había ido a su casa, ella mandaba siempre [dinero] y cuando fue, ella... las maletas se quedaron, entonces su hija ya mayor, le preguntó 'y mami, a'ónde están las maletas' 'que se quedaron...' y dice ella que le dijo '¿y pa' qué viniste?'"
- <sup>9</sup> Mina, tape VN12, 8/1/1: "Nunca he visitado España, tengo allá cuatro hijos, me beneficié de dos, pero de dos nos. ¿Me entiende?, porque ellos a mí no me atienden, porque yo soy una mujer ya de unos cincuenta y pico de años, poniendo 55 años."
- <sup>10</sup> Altagracia, tape T16:8/8/01. "Cómo te digo... en un lado no tengo suerte, pero por otro sí. En lo único que te puedo decir que no tengo suerte es en eso, porque me dio Dios seis hijos sanos que mis hijos no han tenido que estar ingresados en un hospital, mis hijos nunca han estado enfermos... y tú sabes que eso es una suerte, una suerte y... bueno, yo digo que es una suerte, más que ser millonario, porque imagínate tú, allí que a veces

hay tantas contaminaciones y que yo, vamos que aunque quisiera no podía estar al lado de mis hijos como Dios manda porque tenía que irme a trabajar y mira, ahí están [nos quedamos mirando las fotos de la pared]"

- <sup>11</sup> See also W.J.T. Mitchell (1994), in which he sees the relationship between photography and language as a site of resistance.
- <sup>12</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell uses the terms "textual pictures" and "pictorial texts." According to Hirsch, these terms perfectly fit her own hybrid conceptualisation of image-texts. Before reading Mitchell's *Picture Theory*, Hirsch referred to the description of photographs as "prose pictures" and to photographs that constitute narratives as "visual fictions" or "visual narratives" (Hirsch: 1997, 272).
- <sup>13</sup> In this section, I include the spatial gaps filled in by narratives transmitted via photographs. The generation gaps or time intervals linked by pictures are also a very interesting topic, which is not within the scope of this article. In this regard, Barthes' *Camera Lucida* is particularly telling. Barthes dedicates his *Camera Lucida* to the relationship established between photographs, the referents, and the readers of the photographs, constructing an elegiac autobiographical narrative seeing his late elderly mother as the child she was: "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed" (Barthes: 1981, 80–1, quoted from Hirsch: 1997, 4–5).
- <sup>14</sup> Photographs have a direct connection with the referent and their indexical nature is what might change them into relics or fetishes. When I returned to Madrid after my trip to the Dominican Republic in March 2001, I came back with fifteen roles of film, I prepared three albums for the three families I had strong ties with in Vicente Noble. Ladys took the albums with her when she went back for Easter that year (to bring her baby girl to her mother). Ladys waited a few days to deliver one of the albums. One night she dreamt of Pedro, the grandfather of one of the families. When she took the album the following day, she received the news that Pedro had passed away that very night. Ladys later explained that pictures are powerful objects for communicating with the deceased. The same quality is pointed out by Gillian Bennett, when describing the use of photographs to communicate with the dead (Bennett: 1999, 97–98). This capacity is due to their indexical quality to signify life (Barthes: 1981, 82).
- <sup>15</sup> In the case of the Hmong in France, the importance of letters and videos in funeral rites has been pointed out by Schnapper, "thanks to the exchange of letters and cassettes, the Hmong settled in France send the funds necessary to see that funeral rites are carried out in Laos, which makes possible the transmigration of the deceased's soul to the world of the dead" (Schnapper: 1999, 243). See Jo Ann Koltyk for a study of Hmong family-produced videos and the narratives embedded in them (Koltyk: 1993).
- <sup>16</sup> See also Grasmuck and Pessar (1991, 133–161) and Georges (1990).

- <sup>17</sup> Appadurai's transnational model is being contested by various scholars who consider his conclusions to be only applicable to elites. However, I think that Appadurai's analysis of the global flows is of extreme value when analysing cultural artefacts, rather than ethnographically analysing transnational communities.

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