FOSTERING FEELINGS: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF PAID FOSTER CARE WORK

IN US-GUATEMALAN TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION

By

Shelley G. Harshe

Submitted to the

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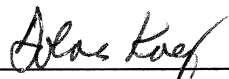
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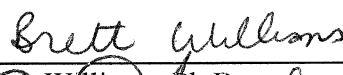
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Anthropology

Chair:

Dolores Koenig, Ph.D.

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Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

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Date

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Washington, D.C. 20016

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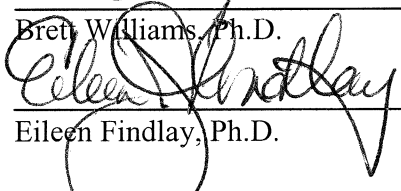the Requirements for the Degree of
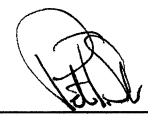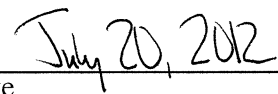
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ABSTRACT

Adopting children from other countries has become an increasingly prevalent way to create and expand families in the United States. A surge in transnational adoption began at the end of World War II as a humanitarian response to orphaned children. By 2006, Guatemala had become second only to China in the number of children adopted from abroad but, per capita, was the largest source of children adopted to the US. One of the factors that contributed to prospective adoptive parents' decision to adopt from Guatemala was the use of private foster care. In Guatemala, foster mothers, usually working class women, provided babies and young children with temporary homes before the children were moved to permanent homes, typically in developed countries with relatively affluent parents. Adoption agencies in the United States advertised their services noting that this private foster system provided a developmentally healthier and more loving environment for children than traditional institutional care facilities like orphanages. Yet, transnational adoption was also part of a market in which money was exchanged for services. Foster mothers were part of this private-sector market and received monetary compensation for their services. Based on interviews with Guatemalan foster mothers, fostering was a special type of job; it was paid maternal care work that involved both economic and deeply affective relationships. Since the women fostered children within a context in which cultural notions such as "care" and "work," and "kinship" and "economy" are understood as separate categories, their paid foster mothering was an ambiguous position because it could be understood both as a caring, kin-like relationship and as economic work. This dissertation

examines the meanings that Guatemalan foster mothers gave to the particular bundle of commodified labor and affective caring involved in their paid care work within the context of transnational adoption. The intention of this project is to understand how the women experienced their care work, that is, what the women thought and felt about fostering children in their homes. Such an understanding must include how the larger political economic context in which fostering occurred informed and shaped the women's experiences.

PREFACE

All translations of direct quotes from the Spanish language included in this dissertation, whether from written sources or interviews, are my own. For the interviews with Guatemalan foster mothers, I conducted and transcribed the interviews in Spanish. To safeguard anonymity, I used pseudonyms for the foster mothers as well as for all people to whom they referred in their narratives. I then used the Spanish transcriptions for my analysis of the women's narratives, only translating into English those segments of the interviews cited herein. Although fluent in Spanish, throughout the process, I consulted with native Spanish speakers when necessary and appropriate.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank everyone in Guatemala who took time out of their busy lives to speak with me about transnational adoption, especially the women who shared with me their memories about fostering children. Without their generosity, this project on foster care work would not have been possible. Listening to their experiences has changed the way I view the world and, for that, I am forever grateful. *Muchísimas gracias por todo*. I would also like to thank the owner of the hotel in Antigua for her insight and friendship, and for providing me a home away from home.

In the United States, I was taken aback by how interested other people were in the topic of transnational adoption and, as our conversations continued, how interested they became in the role of Guatemalan foster mothers. Each of these conversations—whether at work, at coffee shops, or on the metro—encouraged me to continue writing and helped me think through my ideas. Thank you all.

I feel fortunate to have had such a wonderful dissertation committee. I would like to thank Dolores Koenig, Brett Williams, and Eileen Findlay for their support and encouragement throughout the project. I especially want to thank Dolores for teaching me how to write about methodology, for keeping me on track, and for carefully, and critically, readings drafts of my chapters.

And, of course, I couldn't have completed this project without loving and supportive and, most importantly, patient, friends and family. I thank Ellen Feder for believing in my project even before I did, and for reminding me—on a daily basis—that I had it in me to do this all along. I thank Andrea Tschemplik for much appreciated comic relief, and for the many thoughtful conversations she elicited from me that helped me out of many a mental rut. I thank Penelope Hucker for lots of rejuvenating brunch breaks and for persistently reminding me of the

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CNA   *Consejo Nacional de Adopciones* (Guatemala's National Adoption Council)

ILPEC   *Instituto Latinoamericano para la Educación y la Comunicación* (Latin American Institute for Education and Communication)

KMC   Kangaroo mother care

PGN   *Procuraduría General de la Nación* (Guatemala's Attorney General's Office)

CHAPTER 1

AFFECTING ECONOMIC RELATIONS: PAID FOSTER CARE WORK IN

TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION

Adopting children from other countries has become an increasingly prevalent way to

create and expand families in the United States. A surge in transnational adoption began at the

end of World War II as a humanitarian response to orphaned children. By 2006, over 20,000

children were being adopted annually from abroad to the United States (US Department of State

2009). Guatemala had become second only to China in the number of children adopted from

abroad but, per capita, was the largest source of children adopted to the US. One of the factors

that contributed to prospective adoptive parents' decision to adopt from Guatemala was the use

of private foster care. In Guatemala, foster mothers, usually working class women, provided

babies and young children with temporary homes before the children were moved to permanent

homes, typically in developed countries with relatively affluent parents. Adoption agencies in the

United States advertised their services noting that this private foster system provided a

developmentally healthier and more loving environment for children than traditional institutional

care facilities like orphanages. Yet, transnational adoption was also part of a market in which

money was exchanged for services. Foster mothers were part of this private-sector market and

received monetary compensation for their services.

This dissertation is about the Guatemalan women who fostered children awaiting

adoption to the United States. Since the women fostered children within a context in which

cultural notions such as "care" and "work," and "kinship" and "economy" are understood as

separate categories, their paid foster mothering was an ambiguous position because it could be

understood both as a caring, kin-like relationship and as economic work. Based on interviews I

conducted with Guatemalan foster mothers, the women acknowledged fostering as a job, but

they also emphasized their caring, loving relationships with the babies and children who shared their homes and became part of their lives. Fostering was a special type of job; it was paid maternal care work that involved both economic and deeply affective relationships. How did private-sector foster mothers in Guatemala experience and make sense of their seemingly ambiguous paid care work within the context of US-Guatemalan transnational adoption in which their experiences occurred? What are the meanings that these women gave to this particular bundle of commodified labor and affective caring?

My research on Guatemalan foster mothers as paid care workers in transnational adoption is both narrow in focus and broad in scope. The intention of this project is to understand how the women experienced their care work, that is, what the women thought and felt about fostering children in their homes. Yet, such an understanding must include how the larger political economic context in which fostering occurred informed and shaped the women's experiences. The project also intends to demonstrate how the theoretical approaches taken serve to illuminate the women's personal experiences and, in turn, how the women's experiences serve to enhance our understandings of the theoretical approaches. The four main theoretical threads central to my research are the anthropology of the political economy of kinship and adoption, the interdisciplinary literature on care work, the anthropology of emotion, and the literature on liminality.

Although a study of Guatemalan foster mothers as paid care workers may not appear at first glance to be about kinship, adoption is a process of creating kinship and the foster mothers were an integral part of the adoption system. Given the breadth of literature on kinship, I have divided the discussion into two parts. The first section centers on cultural understandings of kinship and on how these seemingly intimate relationships also serve to reproduce social,

economic, and political inequalities. The second section adds the concept of "market" to the topic of kinship, using the literatures on adoption and alternative reproductive technologies to discuss the interrelatedness of kinship and market, and the issue of commodification. The third section brings together issues related to kinship, affective relations, market, and work, through an overview of the literature on care work, focusing specifically on the ideological differentiation between care and work, the gendered distribution and valuation of care work, the issue of the commodification of care, and the association of paid care work with kinship.

I then shift to a discussion of the literatures from which my methodological approaches develop. The fourth section addresses the themes in the anthropological literature on emotion most salient to my research, including the debate over how to conceptualize emotion, the challenges to developing an approach that gives equal merit to feeling and meaning, and discursive approaches to emotion. I end the section with an explanation of how Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" serves to further conceptualize emotive language as a methodological approach to emotion. The fifth section discusses the anthropological literature on liminality, focusing on key themes to the topic of care work, such as definitions of liminality, ambiguity, and ambivalence; liminality as permanent state; and the emotional aspect of liminality. I end the section with an explanation of how pairing Victor Turner's concept of "liminality" with Bourdieu's notion of "habitus" might serve as a useful framework for getting at how liminality works in terms of political economy. I end this chapter with a summary of the chapters to follow.

<center>The Political Economy of Kinship</center>

The anthropological literature on the political economy of kinship and, as a subset of this, transnational adoption, situates my research project. A political economic perspective is a "cultural history" approach that looks at the intersection of local institutions and the political and

<center>3</center>

economic processes occurring at the local, national, and global levels (Roseberry 1988:163;

Greenhalgh 1990:87). Such an approach attends to unequal relations of power, especially the

interplay of race, class, and gender ideologies that have historically been used to perpetuate such

inequalities (e.g., Smedley 1999:694). Bringing a political economic approach to the personal

level illuminates how intimate relationships are shaped by and reinforce political and economic

hierarchies, but also how personal relationships may influence understandings of the larger

political economic context (Stoler 1991; Franklin and McKinnon 2001). For example, in her

research on colonial authority in Indonesia, Ann Stoler (1991) demonstrates how sanctions

intended to control intimate sexual and conjugal relationships served to carry out colonial racial

and economic policies.

In the case of kinship, our understandings about who may be kin to whom are grounded

in, but also serve to shape, ideologies of race, gender, and class (Franklin and McKinnon 2001;

Dorow 2006:66), and state policies and national discourse continue to play a critical role in

shaping and regulating local ideas and experiences of kinship (Barnett and Silverman 1979:60;

Peletz 1995:362). In other words, kinship, as a classification system, is both inclusionary and

exclusionary and is intimately embedded in other classification systems of differential power

such as race, gender, and class (Franklin and McKinnon 2001:15; Peletz 2001:432). The

literature on the political economy of transnational adoption, in particular, raises questions of

how these underlying ideologies affect beliefs, practices, and policies regarding parenthood, that

is, in defining who may or may not be parents or which children may or may not be considered

adoptable. The process of creating families of a particular kind, then, is part of establishing

similarities and differences between oneself and others (Carsten 2004:82). The building of

kinship ties entails the inclusion of some people and the exclusion of others, such as other

potential parents and children in the case of adoption (Taylor 2004:5–6; Dorow 2006:203). The literature on the political economy of kinship approaches the exclusionary nature of kinship in a number of ways, including the key themes of the tension between biological and social understandings of kinship, the naturalization of kinship, and the process of kinning.

A fundamental issue of kinship studies is the matter of biological versus social kinship. Scholarly conceptions of kinship have shifted focus from assuming a biological definition of kinship in concrete biological terms (i.e., blood) to acknowledging and examining a more culturally based understanding of kinship (Schneider 1980[1968]:23). As some anthropologists attempt to denaturalize kinship, the task of figuring out how to define kinship can be challenging (Peletz 1995:348). Since kinship terms "are inherently linking terms" (Faubion 2001:3), a shift in focus from "kinship" to social "relatedness" may help free our conceptualizations of kinship from biological bases (Peletz 1995; Carsten 2004). The concept of relatedness, however, is much broader than kinship, incorporating other types of relations such as amity and enmity. Therefore, I use the term *kinship* to refer to relationships in which the parties involved consider themselves kin or family. Adoption, then, is a specific case of kinship formation.[1]

What has emerged in more recent kinship studies, however, is a discourse grappling with the tensions between putative binary oppositions such as biological and social, nature and culture, and private and public (Stack 1975; Schneider 1980[1968]; Carsten 2004). Yet, all these tensions are different ways of referring to the same paradox that arises from the discrepancies between social and biological understandings of kinship, namely, that a biological model, at least to some extent, continues to inform our notion of "kinship" even for instances where no biological relatedness exists or where the social aspects of biological relatedness may be of

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[1] My discussion of adoption is limited to formal adoption, that is, "the method of establishing by law the social relationship of parent and child between individuals who are not each other's biological parents or child" (Carp 1998:3).

greater significance (Faubion 2001:3). For example, the concept of "adoption" would be meaningless without a biological model of kinship as a referent (Howell 2006:38). Also, although adoption as an accepted way to create kinship between adoptive parents and children is a common practice that seems to put to rest a biologically grounded definition of kinship, adoptive parents continue to be confronted with "a society that views adoption as inferior to blood kinship" (Carp 1998:2). As such, an analysis of the ways in which kinship is understood as both biological and social is essential to the study of the formation of families though adoption from a political economic perspective.

One framework used in recent kinship studies to address the dual inclusionary and exclusionary nature of kinship is the concept of "naturalization." The study of adoption and reproductive technologies, in particular, conspicuously denaturalizes kinship by raising questions about the putative significance of biological relations (Howell 2006:4, 381). These studies examine the processes of naturalization—that is, the ways in which ideas about biological or "natural" relatedness frame notions about social relationships with no apparent basis in biology, such as gay kinship and adoptive ties—and the power of naturalizing discourses to perpetuate hierarchical differences (Thompson 2001; Carsten 2004). Naturalization occurs at many levels. For example, Janet Carsten (2004) looks at the links between the naturalization of kinship and nationalist ideologies, while Charis Thompson (2001:175) analyzes the many different ways in which participants of gestational surrogacy and in vitro fertilization prioritize certain traits over others, such as procreative intent over biological substance, either naturalizing or denaturalizing kinship in order to make sense of their particular role in the formation of kinship. The ambiguities and tensions of (de)naturalization are highlighted as well by the issue of adoptive children's identity as perceived by parents and adoption agencies, a prominent theme in

transnational adoption literature (Telfer 2003; Yngvesson 2004; Rothman 2005; Volkman 2005; Dorow 2006). Two conflicting stories of transnational adoption coexist: 1) a denaturalized story of abandonment and separation, in which the child is loosed from familial ties and given a new identity and place, and 2) a naturalized story of roots, in which the child's ethnic background is preserved (Yngvesson 2004:169). These stories show both the pull of the biological model (identity as rooted in national soil) and the impulse to create new forms of kinship (identity as an open cultural space) (Volkman 2005:88, 103).

Another approach for emphasizing both the social and political aspects of kinship is to focus on the processes of creating kinship, what Signe Howell (2006) refers to as "kinning." Kinning is the process by which a person "is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people, and [in which] the connection is expressed in a conventional kin idiom" (Howell 2006:8). Through personal, social, and legal practices, the person becomes incorporated into the kin group. For example, the practices of kinning a baby or child may include providing emotional and instrumental care, acting and speaking affectionately, displaying and distributing photographs of a son or daughter, choosing a name, and obtaining a birth certificate. Not usually obvious to those involved, the processes of kinning are clearly marked in the case of transnational adoption (Howell 2006:64). Through kinning, the child is included into the adoptive family. Although kinning is an inclusionary process, it is also an exclusionary one (i.e., of anyone not considered kin). In the case of transnational adoption, adoptive parents often incorporate children into their kin groups with the awareness that (unknown) biological relatives exist in the children's country of origin (Howell 2006:64). Kinning of transnationally adopted children, then, requires "de-kinning," stripping the children

of past relations to make them socially naked and, thus, available for adoption into a new kin group (Howell 2006:9).

De-kinning occurs at the personal level, for example, in prospective adoptive parents' preference for a closed instead of open, or a transnational instead of domestic, adoption;[2] in the choices adoptive parents make as to whether or not to discuss the children's biological parents with them; and in the biological parents' decisions to relinquish their children. Yet, the adoptive parents' ability to kin these children and the biological parents' reasons for relinquishing them are often results of racial, gender, class, and economic inequalities between and within receiving and sending countries (Dorow 2006:2). The perpetuation of such inequalities through kinning and de-kinning also occurs at the level of the state. For example, before a child may be adopted into the United States, he or she must fit the US's definition of *orphan*, a child who must either not have parents, due to death of or abandonment by both parents, or have one parent, either an unwed mother or surviving parent, who is incapable of caring for him or her (Wilken 1995:91). The state's notion of orphan, then, can mean abandonment or inadequate material or emotional care, but it does not attend to the structural roots of poverty that explain why this happens in the first place (Briggs 2003:180). Although the majority of transnationally adopted children have at least one living biological parent (Brysk 2004), the children are deemed "abandoned" children, what Lisa Cartwright (2005:186) refers to as "social orphans." Within adoption discourse, the child becomes a "child in need" in an apparent state of "kinlessness" (Telfer 2003:77). Officially labeling children *orphans* serves to erase the presence of the biological parents and, thus, the structural inequalities underlying the relinquishment of their children. With its connotations of abandonment, *orphan* has become an emotionally laden word in the United States. As such, it

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[2] As domestic adoption policies in the United States trend away from secrecy and sealed records toward more disclosure and varying degrees of open adoption (Carp 1998:202; Modell 2002), some prospective parents prefer the finality transnational adoption provides in regards to biological mothers' ties to their children.

adds to the emotional response of prospective adoptive parents, who feel good about being able to provide a family to a child they now can perceive to be without one.

The scholarship on the political economy of kinship raises questions about how what appear to be personal decisions about creating family—intimate processes of inclusion—also may serve to reproduce social, economic, and political inequalities. The concepts of "kinning," "de-kinning," "naturalization," and "denaturalization" raise questions about how the ways in which people practice, feel, and talk about kinship may both contribute to and challenge unequal relations of power. Much of the anthropological literature on adoption has focused on informal, non-Western adoption and fostering practices (e.g., Marshall 1976; Bowie 2004; Fonseca 2005). Despite the recent increase in anthropological research on domestic and transnational adoption in the United States and Europe (e.g., Modell 1994; Volkman 2005; Howell 2006), most deal with transnational adoptions with China or Korea (e.g., Dorow 2006), as these two countries historically provided the most children for transnational adoption (Simon and Altstein 2000). Adoption of Guatemalan children to the United States has not received sustained attention by social scientists working in the area of transnational adoption, and few have focused on the importance of foster care within this context. Also, while recent anthropological studies on transnational adoption certainly obviate the inclusionary and exclusionary aspects of kinship, the discussion thus far has been limited to the adoptive parents, the biological parents, and the children, that is, the adoption triad. Yet, children adopted transnationally generally do not go directly from their biological to their adoptive homes. Many children live in orphanages during the transition; others live in foster homes.

Although my study of Guatemalan foster mothers may not appear at first glance to be about kinship since the women were paid care workers of, not permanent mothers to, the

children for whom they cared, foster mothers' understandings about the adoption process and their place within it likely were informed by underlying notions about social and biological kinship. Introducing foster mothers to the study of the political economy of kinship raises questions about how these women understood their participation in the adoption process, how their participation may have contributed to the kinning and de-kinning of others, and how they may have been excluded by the process. For example, what role might the care workers of children awaiting adoption play in the processes of kinning and de-kinning? While the children were in foster homes, did the foster mothers describe their relationships with the children in kin terms? If so, what might this use of kin terms tell us about the inclusionary and exclusionary aspects of the women's foster care work? How did the foster mothers situate themselves in relation to the biological and adoptive parents? How might the ways in which foster mothers (de)naturalized the parenthood of biological and adoptive parents have served to reproduce or challenge unequal relations of power or to make sense of their own role in the formation of kinship?

Adoption, Market, and Commodification

A salient issue raised by the literature on the political economy of kinship is the relationship between kinship, market, and commodification, particularly in studies of kinship formed through reproductive technologies (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995; Taylor 2004; Ertman 2008) or adoption (Anagnost 2004; Yngvesson 2004; Smith 2005; Dorow 2006; Spar 2006). The study of transnational adoption, in particular, addresses the interrelatedness of market and kinship by highlighting ways in which the adoption process parallels the global marketplace (Anagnost 2004; Brysk 2004; Spar 2006). In the current international political economic system, the transfer of kinship from one (set of) parent(s) to another requires the exchange of money, and the

transfer of children from the developing countries of their origin to the developed countries of

their adoptive parents also resembles the flow of recognizable commodities such as agricultural

and manufactured products (Anagnost 2004:160; Brysk 2004:172). Transnational adoption

resembles a market in that adoption agencies charge fees for the services they provide, as do

lawyers, social workers, and governmental agencies and embassies. A portion of these fees

create additional jobs for adoption intermediaries and care workers. Transnational adoption is

also tied to the tourist industry, as prospective parents traveling to the children's country of

origin pay for the services of travel agents, hotel rooms, airfare, meals in restaurants, and

souvenirs and gifts. In many instances transnational adoption has become intertwined with illicit

markets; over the past 15 years, transnational adoption has effectively closed in over 40 percent

of the top 40 sending countries due to concerns regarding its connection to corruption, child

trafficking, and the coercion of biological parents (Brysk 2004:166; Smolin 2004).

Many adoption agencies also advertise their services in newspapers, on websites, and in

brochures, and some websites provide lists and photographs of "available" children searchable

by country, health, age, gender, and race (Dorow 2006; Spar 2006). In some cases, agencies also

provide incentives of lower fees, what Debora Spar refers to as "differentiated prices"

(2006:186), for prospective parents who are willing to adopt "less desirable" children. While the

reason behind discount incentives is to increase the chances of finding homes for hard to place

children, differentiated fees nevertheless place higher monetary values on more desirable

children and lower monetary values on less desirable children. For the most part, younger,

healthy children are more desirable than older children or children with disabilities (Dorow

2006:74). Intentionally or not, the transnational adoption process functions as a market in many

ways, distinguishing between different "types" of children and valuing children as more or less "adoptable" (Dorow 2006).

These market aspects of the adoption process raise the issue of the commodification of children. Even while the adoption process functions as a market, people express unease over discussing the adoption of children in terms of political economy. Some of the political economy of adoption literature addresses this unease by examining the ways in which the issue of commodification is obscured by the ways people talk about the exchange of money throughout the adoption process: adoptive parents purchase services, not babies, and pay fees, not prices (Yngvesson 2004). This unease is also expressed by some scholars. Although it is widely agreed that children should never be regarded as commodities in the sense that people should never be reduced to things (Taylor 2004), scholars of the political economy of kinship disagree about the utility of applying the concept of "commodification" to the topic of the reproduction of children. Some authors take an anti-commodification approach by condemning the consideration of the reproduction of children in terms of market or commodification as misguided because they believe it objectifies children and threatens their moral personhood (Radin 1996; Smith 2005:116). Other authors argue that a discussion about whether or not adoption and reproductive technologies should be framed theoretically in terms of market and commodification is irrelevant since, in practice, they already function as markets on many levels (Anagnost 2004; Spar 2006; Ertman 2008). Such scholars find the application of the concept of commodification to children and reproductive technologies a useful framework for understanding a particular set of social and political economic relationships surrounding and involving the reproduction of children and the creation of families. Some scholars limit their use of the concept of commodification and market to highlight the negative and exploitative aspects of adoption and reproductive technologies

(Brysk 2004; Rothman 2004). Others caution against assuming that market and commodification are necessarily negative and also consider the potential positive effects of these markets, such as the extension of the option of parenthood to previously excluded individuals (i.e., gay and lesbian families) and the provision of homes for children (Spar 2006; Ertman 2008).

Still other scholars argue for a more nuanced conception of commodification, one that acknowledges that money and markets influence reproduction and kinship, but also are influenced and transformed by social and moral values (Zelizer 1985:212; Wozniak 2004). These authors find more useful a focus on "the *interrelation* between economic and noneconomic factors" (Zelizer 1985:18). For example, Ann Anagnost (2004:148) examines the interrelatedness of the "commodity value" placed on children in transnational adoption—that is, the monetary value of the transactions and materials associated with the transfer of parental kinship—and the "affective value" of the children for the adoptive parents—that is, the emotional investment of the adoptive parents and the perceived future emotional bond between parent and child. While I agree with the usefulness of focusing on the interrelation between economic and noneconomic factors and apply this approach to my research on transnational adoption, I also attempt to advance our understanding of the interrelatedness of economic and noneconomic factors within, rather than in opposition to, the concept of commodification.

The tension between persons and things, or kinship and economy, is key to an understanding of the interrelatedness of social and economic relationships in commodification. Although historically most societies have not found the intertwining of kinship with economy to be particularly problematic, Western intellectual traditions tend to draw a categorical and moral distinction between persons and things and, thus, between the social and the economic (Kopytoff 2004:271–272). While the relationship between the systems of kinship and economy may be

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culturally perceived as opposing, kinship and economy (or care and market, love and money, bodies and commodities) are not mutually exclusive binary pairs (Strathern 1985:193; Kopytoff 2004; Taylor 2004:3; Dorow 2006:66). For example, money and things, such as food or gifts, play a part in relationships among persons, including the enactment of kinship (Barnett and Silverman 1979:59). As Marilyn Strathern keenly explains, kinship and economy are both terms that describe systems that "deploy elements of substance"—persons for the former and things for the latter; that is, they both describe "the social character to the material givens of existence" (1985:192).

The relationship between persons and things, however, becomes obscured in capitalist systems through commodification by (culturally) constructing the value of things without reference to their social sources of production (Strathern 1985:199). The Marxist definition of a commodity "is predicated on perpetually keeping apart 'persons' and 'things'" through the alienation of labor (Strathern 1985:204). According to Karl Marx, in selling their labor for wages, workers produce not only products (things), but also their labor and themselves (persons), as commodities. Workers' labor becomes "congealed" in the products, objects "external" and "alien" to them (Marx 1988[1844]:71–72). Through this process, workers become alienated from their labor, which has gone from being a part of their persons to, in Strathern's words, "a 'thing' of a particular kind" (1985:204). If labor, understood as part of oneself, can be treated as a commodity through the alienation of labor, it then follows that persons may be (mis)treated as things (Strathern 1985:204). While I most certainly am not suggesting that people become or should be thought of as commodities in the same way as agricultural or manufactured products, I am suggesting that any discussion about commodities or commodification is necessarily a discussion about relationships among people. As such, the concept of commodification applied

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to persons—for example, children—should prove to be a useful framework for illuminating not just the interrelation between economic and noneconomic factors of a particular context—such as transnational adoption—but also the personal relationships involved, exploitative or otherwise.

The literature on kinship and market raises questions about how the concept of commodification may be applied to persons and relationships without being reductive, how the relationship between kinship and economy is understood, and how understandings and discourse about kinship and economy may obscure and reproduce social and political economic inequalities. Most studies on transnational adoption focus on the biological and adoptive parents. In Guatemala, however, one of the differentiating characteristics of "adoptable" children was the circumstances surrounding their care. Children under the care of foster mothers were believed to be physically and developmentally healthier than children in orphanages and, for the most part, "adoptable" children were cared for by foster mothers and those not considered adoptable lived in orphanages (ILPEC 2000). Given the central role of fostering in the marketing of adoption and the functioning of the adoption process, I expect a nuanced conceptualization of commodification applied to children to provide insight into the foster mothers' own understandings of how children were (mis)treated through the process of adoption. As a provider of some of the services that the adoptive parents' "fees" purchased, how did the foster mothers themselves understand this monetary transaction? How might the concept of commodification of children add to our understanding of foster mothers in Guatemala? Did they think about the adoption process in terms that suggested commodification? What does this tell us about their relationship to and knowledge of the functioning of the adoption process? Did the foster mothers acknowledge the differences in socioeconomic status and opportunities of the biological mothers,

the prospective adoptive parents, and themselves? What might this tell us about the political economic aspects of the adoption system?

Care, Work, and Care Work

The literature on care work brings together issues related to kinship, affective relations, work, and market by examining the cultural understandings and distribution of activities involved in providing care for others within the broader political economic context. Care work, whether paid or unpaid, is the activity of being responsive to and meeting the physical and emotional needs of others, most often those who are inevitably dependent on such activities, for example, small children or the elderly (Bubeck 1995:9; Kittay 1999:ix; Cancian and Oliker 2000:2). Care work is comprised of both physical labor—the instrumental tasks of physical care such as feeding, clothing, and bathing dependents—and affective labor—the relational connections of emotional care, such as showing affection, feeling empathy, or giving a hug (Nelson 1990; Cancian and Oliker 2000:2). Dependency and vulnerability are key aspects of care work. By definition, the recipients of care work are dependent on the care workers to meet their physical and emotional needs and, because of their dependency, are vulnerable to the care workers (Kittay 1999:ix). Yet, as Eva Kittay (1999) effectively explains, care workers also are vulnerable because of the nature of their care work. Given the recipient's reliance on the care worker, care work carries a heavier moral obligation than many other types of work, requiring a responsiveness to the physical and emotional needs of the recipient (Kittay 1999:129–130). In other words, care workers are tied to their work in ways that other workers may not be because of their moral obligation to meet recipients' needs and because of their own emotional attachment to the recipients of their care. For example, custodial parents are obligated to care for their small children, as denying such care would be detrimental to the children's development

and survival, and, in most cases, parents would not withhold their care work because of their own emotional attachment to their children.

While the activity of providing care is often called *caregiving* both in popular usage and by scholars (Abel and Nelson 1990; Cancian and Oliker 2000; MacDonald 2010), other scholars use the term *care work* (Bubeck 1995; Harrington Meyer et al. 2000; England 2005). Although giving is certainly part of the activities of caring, the word *giving* has altruistic connotations of free, voluntary action, which implicitly prioritizes the affective aspects of providing care and implies that the care given is at no cost to, or at a cost unproblematic for, the "giver" (Harrington Meyer et al. 2000:2). Yet, these implicit assumptions may not accurately reflect the often conflicting experiences of those who provide care. I have chosen to use the term *care work* in an attempt to emphasize the coexistence of the affective and the instrumental labor of such activities without prioritizing one over the other and to acknowledge that the activity of providing care to others is a type of work situated within a broader political economic context (Bubeck 1995:14).

I refer to those who provide care work as *care workers*. Care workers include both unpaid providers of care—such as parents for their children (Kittay 1999) or sons and daughters for ailing parents (Merrill 1997)—and paid providers of care—such as family day care providers (Nelson 1990), child care center employees (Uttal and Tuominen 1999), nurses (Lundgren and Browner 1990; Dodson and Zincavage 2007), and nannies (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). The literature on unpaid and paid care workers are intricately linked as notions of unpaid care work inform understandings of paid care work. This literature addresses the way in which historic, cultural ideals of unpaid care work have served both to value and devalue certain aspects of the work, how this valuation led to the unequal distribution of unpaid care work, and how these ideals and valuations carry over to paid care work. Given the extensive research

available on care work, I discuss here the issues most salient to my research, namely, the ideological differentiation between care and work, the gendered distribution and valuation of care work, approaches to the issue of the commodification of care, the association of paid care work with kinship, and the continued relevance of the public versus private location of paid care work.

A key theme of the literature on care work is the gendered ideological distinction between care and work. While anthropological and sociological studies have found that most societies ascribe at least a few tasks to women and other tasks to men, they also reveal that the tasks assigned to men and women, aside from breastfeeding and the earliest care of infants, vary enormously across different cultures and time periods (Coltrane and Galt 2000:22). I limit the discussion here to a brief overview of the gendered division between work and care in Europe and the Americas. Also, little attention has been given to documenting the cultural understandings and expectations of men's care (Coltrane and Galt 2000:17). While I agree that the inclusion of men to the research of care work is important, my research focus on foster care as paid work in Guatemala nevertheless centers on the women employed to provide such work since men were not employed to do so.

With industrialization in 19th century western Europe and North America, economic production became separated from households. As a result, paid work and unpaid care came to be culturally construed as separate and framed in terms of related putatively opposing binaries: "work" became the paid, rational, skilled, cultural activities of men in the productive, public sphere, while "care" became the unpaid, emotional, unskilled, natural activities of women in the reproductive, private sphere (Cancian 2000:138; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000:160). The dominant ideal that paid work was only for men and that women were best suited to care in the home has

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never reflected the everyday reality of most families, since class and race, in addition to gender, have been important factors in the distribution of care and work (Abel 2000; Cancian 2000:138; Coltrane and Gatt 2000:27). For example, poor women, especially women of color, historically have had to work long hours outside the home and "have had to struggle to be able to care for intimates" (Abel 2000:9). In other words, while some women may have become burdened with providing care to their families, others were excluded from the possibility of caring for their own families full time. Also, the paid work some of these women do outside the home is care work, meaning they provide care for others' families at the expense of their own families' care (Nakano Glen 1994:7; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000:149; Dodson and Zincavage 2007:2).

Given the historical influence of Europe, and later the United States, in Latin America, these binary oppositions also inform gendered notions of care and work in much of Latin America. In Latin America, gendered ideals of family have generally depicted men as the primary decision-makers and the sole economic providers of the household and women as loving, faithful mothers and housewives, the primary provider of emotional support and care and dependent on men's income and decisions (Stølen 1996:176; Chant 2003:167). As an extension of this ideal, men's fulfillment was understood to derive from paid care work outside the home, while women's fulfillment was expected to derive from their unpaid care work as wives and mothers. Women's paid work outside the home, then, was to be strictly for monetary compensation in order to better fulfill their mothering, not directly for personal fulfillment (García and de Oliveira 1997:368). As in the United States, the ideals did not reflect the reality of poorer families (Segura 1994). Despite the fact that the ideals have never reflected the reality of the majority and despite the ever increasing participation of women in the workplace, the dichotomies framing care and work as separate continue to shape our understandings and

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practices of care work (Cancian 2000:138; Cancian and Oliker 2000:88; Coltrane and Gatt 2000:27–30; Chant 2003:167).

While paid care work challenges the historical, putative dichotomies that define unpaid care and paid work as separate, such underlying cultural understandings continue to shape the distribution and valuation of paid care work and serve to reinforce and perpetuate unequal social and economic conditions (Stølen 1996:160; Tuominen 2000:134–135). For example, the distribution of both unpaid and paid care work, while not exclusively or inevitably the realm of women, continues to be done mostly by women (Kittay 1999:xiii; Uttal and Tuominen 1999:760; Cancian and Oliker 2000:3; Harrington Meyer et al. 2000). In addition, within this ideological framework, the "care" of care work is culturally valued, since it is assumed to be done "out of love," while the "work" of care work is culturally and economically devalued or ignored because it is assumed to be unskilled, "natural" ability (Uttal and Tuominen 1999:760; Cancian 2000:140; Cancian and Oliker 2000:9). Since good wages are assumed to be the reward for specialized skills and knowledge, the continued association of care as "women's work" serves to justify as fair (artificially) low wages for such work, thus obscuring the importance of fair wages for care work (Uttal and Tuominen 1999:764; Cancian 2000:140).

Just as the introduction of the exchange of money to the context of creating families raised the issues of the commodification of children and the tension between notions of kinship and economy, the introduction of wages to the context of care work raises the issues of the commodification of care and the tension between notions of care and work (market). As with the relationship between the systems of kinship and economy, the notions of care and market may be culturally perceived as opposing but they are not mutually exclusive binary pairs (Zelizer 2002; Dorow 2006:66). For example, intimate social interactions regularly coexist with money

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transactions in the form of alimony payments, children's allowances, wills, remittances, and parents' care of their children (Zelizer 2002:279). Although care and market coexist in unpaid care work, paid care work makes apparent the interrelatedness of the two. Nevertheless, scholars of care work have found that care workers and those who use their services continue to express a tension between care as a commitment to human relationships and market as the arena of wages and jobs (Uttal and Tuominen 1999:759).

The recent literature on care work addresses the issue of the potential exploitation of paid care work—and, of particular concern, the affective aspects of such work—in two main ways: the "commodification of emotion" framework and the "love and money" framework (England 2005). The commodification of emotion framework applies materialist concepts like "commodification" and "alienation of labor" to the topic of care work as a way to highlight the potentially exploitative aspects of such work within a political economic context (Bubeck 1995). Such scholars examine how the flow of care work resembles the extraction of materials and other labor from developed to developing countries (Hochschild 2003; England 2005:382). For example, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2000) illustrates how, in postindustrial countries generally, many of the paid care workers are from developing countries, thus extracting the women's affective labor from developing to developed countries, as in the cases of Mexican, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan women coming to the United States to work as nannies. While these jobs may allow the women financially to support their own families from afar, the women struggle to provide affective care to their families, often relying on family members and friends back home (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000:155).

The commodification of emotion scholarship also examines how the affective labor required of care workers as part of the care they provide resembles the alienation of other types

of labor (Hochschild 1983). Within the framework of commodification, the affective aspects of paid work may be framed in terms of alienation of labor.[3] As developed in Arlie Hochschild's seminal study of service workers (e.g., flight attendants), "emotional labor" requires workers to induce or suppress feelings—to manage their feelings—to produce a desired state of mind in others and may alienate workers from an aspect of self "that is *used* to do the work" (1983:6). According to Marx (1988[1844]:73), in selling their labor, workers become alienated from the products they produce and from their own labor, now part of the product, the commodity. Extrapolating from this, Hochschild (1983:7) asserts that, if workers of manufactured goods become alienated from the goods they produce, then workers performing services can become alienated from services they render. Alienated emotional labor, then, can be understood as a commodity in the marketplace (Hochschild 1983:14). As a type of service, in turn, care work may be understood within the framework of alienation of affective labor, a useful framework for considering the ways in which paid care work may serve to exploit the workers' affective bonds to their charges.

In contrast, the money and love approach to paid care work examines the coexistence and interrelatedness of care and market, arguing that a focus on paid care work solely as a form of exploited labor does not adequately reflect the experiences of care workers (England 2005). While care workers may feel they are being exploited or underappreciated, and may in fact be exploited and underappreciated, they also often express satisfaction in doing valued and meaningful work (Uttal and Tuominen 1999:769). In other words, paid care work can be both exploitative and rewarding. For example, affective bonds between care workers and their charges—part of the labor required of "good" care work—may tie workers to their low paying

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[3] The concept of alienation of labor was discussed in detail in the previous section on the political economy of kinship.

jobs, keeping them from asking for higher wages or better working conditions out of fears of losing their jobs and, thus, contact with their charges, but these bonds may also be what makes the work satisfying and fulfilling for the worker (England 2005:390). By expanding the analysis of care work beyond the potential exploitative aspects of the work, the money and love approach attempts more accurately to reflect how care workers experience their work. My research on paid foster mothers in Guatemala bridges these two approaches, as I understand them to be complementary rather than opposing. Although the commodification of emotion approach has been criticized for tending solely to the harmful aspects of care work (England 2005), its application does not preclude one from exploring the positive dimensions of care work as well. As with the commodification of children, I expect a nuanced conceptualization of the commodification of care framework to provide insight into the foster mothers' own understandings of how others involved in the adoption process (mis)treated them, particularly in the case of their direct employers, the lawyers and agency facilitators.

A key theme in the literature on paid care work that addresses both the exploitation and satisfaction experienced by care workers is the association of paid care work with kinship. Several scholars have discussed how paid care workers describe their work as similar to kin relations (Nelson 1990; Uttal and Tuominen 1999; Dodson and Zincavage 2007). Assuming that employers pay employees for work they expect to be done well, affective bonds are an important and necessary part of paid care work. Workers, their charges, and their employers often use kinship as a model for understanding these affective bonds. For example, in their study of certified nursing assistants working in long-term care facilities, Lisa Dodson and Rebekah Zincavage (2007) found that the workers and their managers considered kin-like attachments beneficial to residents as an essential part of good care work and that the workers stressed

affection and familial duty over money as motivations for doing the job. Yet, although kinship in paid care work is not inherently exploitative, several scholars have found that this kinship model of the affective labor of paid care work often serves to obscure and justify exploitative conditions, for example, when the kinship model is nonreciprocal in nature (Uttal and Tuominen 1999; Dodson and Zincavage 2007). In the case of the certified nursing assistants, the workers expressed ambivalence over the ambiguous requirements of their work due to the tension between managing their position "as both a job and as a commitment to care for fictive family members" (Dodson and Zincavage 2007: 906). While some scholars use the term *fictive kinship* to describe these bonds, I prefer to use the term *kin-like relations* because the connotations associated with the word *fictive*—imaginary, not genuine, or, in the case of kinship to children, not biologically based (Funk and Wagnalls 1993:268)—may not accurately capture the felt experiences of the care workers.

Studies focusing on the experiences of paid child care workers, in particular, have found that workers frequently align their care work with mothering, as a model for good care work and as a way to describe the emotional attachment they feel (Nelson 1990:212; Tuominen 2000:119; MacDonald 2010:55). But what do paid child care workers mean when they liken their work to mothering? What mothering is understood to be varies widely depending on gender, race, class, age, locality, personal experiences, and the specific cultural and historical context (Nakano Glen 1994:3; Stølen 1996:159; Chant 2003:168; Maher 2010:18). Such diversity makes defining motherhood and mothering difficult, especially given that the different understandings often contradict and conflict with one another (Stølen 1996:160). As an example of kinship, the diversity of understandings of motherhood and mothering emphasize that they are socially, rather than biologically, constructed (Nakano Glen 1994:3). As a working definition, I define

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motherhood as a socially identified kin relationship between a person and child that
"encompasses a range of physical, emotional, social and care activities," which may include "the
biological labor of reproduction and the cultural and social labor of provisioning, care and
emotional relations" (Maher 2010:16). *Mothering* refers to the daily activities related to the role
of motherhood within a given context.

Although a cross-cultural study of mothering is beyond the scope of the current project,
historical, cultural dominant ideals of mothering in the United States and Latin America serve to
situate the foster mothers' particular experiences of mothering. In the United States, the
dominant ideologies of mothering historically have been framed in terms similar to those of care
work, namely, opposing binaries such as male–female, culture–nature, reason–emotion, public–
private, and work–care. Within this context, mothering is defined by the subordinate poles of
these binaries as the natural activity of women to provide loving care within the home (Nakano
Glen 1994:13). In addition to the daily tasks involved in providing instrumental and affective
care to children, mothering includes the intense emotional attachment between mother and child
and the mother's willingness to respond to the child's emotional and physical needs without
regard to personal sacrifices (Nelson 1990:212; MacDonald 2010:10). Similarly, in Latin
America, ideals of motherhood depict mothers as providers of love and care in the home (Stølen
1996:176; Chant 2003:167). Mothering, supported by the Catholic church's imagery of the
Virgin Mary, is also associated with virtue, suffering, and self-denial; that is, mothering is
virtuous because of its inherent suffering (symbolized by Mary witnessing the death of her son)
(Melhuus 1996:246–248; Chant 2003:135, 167). As with the ideals regarding care and work, the
dominant ideologies of mothering accurately describe very few women's experiences.
Nevertheless, these ideologies continue to inform women's understandings of their own

mothering, even while their experiences of mothering often transcend the putative dichotomies defining the ideal (Nakano Glen 1994:15).

Returning to the issue of paid child care workers aligning their care work with mothering, the similarities between mothers and paid child care workers are now clear. Mothering is a kind of care work and, as such, both mothers and paid child care workers provide instrumental and affective care to young children, at times in their own homes alongside other household tasks (Nelson 1990:215). In fact, child care workers can and do perform most of the same mothering activities as mothers do, with the exception of breastfeeding (MacDonald 2010:126). Despite these similarities, however, the notion of "mother" remains culturally differentiated from the notion of "paid child care worker." What, then, are the differences between being a child's mother and being a paid child care worker? Two obvious differences are that most paid child care workers are not kin to their charges and that the workers are paid for the work. The literature on paid child care work provides several other essential differences between mothers and paid child care workers. According to Margaret Nelson, paid child care workers lack the degree of "authority, responsibility, and permanence inherent in the relationship between a mother and her child" (1990:211, 218). Another distinction is the degree of emotional attachment expected of them. Unlike mothers, paid child care workers are expected to maintain a balance between simultaneously loving the children and establishing an emotional distance from them (MacDonald 2010:114), what Nelson refers to as "detached attachment" (Nelson 1990:212).

Given the similarities with the activities of mothering paired with the somewhat ambiguous nature of the differences, it is not surprising that the literature on paid child care workers has found that paid child care workers often have difficulty balancing conflicting expectations, particularly those regarding emotional attachment (Nelson 1990; Dodson and

Zincavage 2007:3). On the one hand, paid child care workers often report their emotional

attachments with the children as the most meaningful aspect of their work and the parents of

these children value this attachment as beneficial for their children. On the other hand, paid care

workers are expected to erase, or detach from, this aspect of their care work and the parents of

the children sometimes feel threatened or worried that such emotional bonds between care

workers and children will detract from their own attachments with the children (MacDonald

2010). Yet, Cameron Lynne MacDonald found that, for the most part, paid child care workers

"colluded in this self-erasure rather than resisting it" (2010:127), perhaps because doing so was

part of their paid work. Mary Tuominen (2000:118) found that workers said they entered family

child care for financial reasons—they needed to work for the money to help support their

families—but also for emotive, relational reasons—they found the work of care and the

relationships with children rewarding. Yet, paid care workers also often have difficulty

expressing the coexistence of the affective aspects of their work with the pay they receive.

Nelson found that family day care workers frequently described their activities with "literal

but's" (1990:213), for example, in explaining that they love the children *but* it is also paid work.

Another key theme in the literature on paid care work is the location of the work. Studies

have found that the public versus private location of the work continues to affect the degree of

exploitation and satisfaction experienced by care workers. Some scholars of paid care work has

found that the putative dichotomy between public and private—which associates paid work with

public and unpaid care with private—is irrelevant to the experiences of care workers since their

"private" care work is paid and their "public" paid work is care (Abel and Nelson 1990:5;

Ungerson 2000). Even though paid care work negates the ideological dichotomy between public

and private and even though much of the feminist scholarship on paid care work is critical of

such dichotomies that assume monetary transactions and caring relations as opposites, others are careful to remind us that the creation and deployment of such putative dichotomies should remain objects of our analysis of how paid care work is understood and experienced since part of people's understandings about care work—both their own work or that of others—are often grounded in such dichotomies (Zelizer 2002:278). For example, Nelson found that paid family day care providers had "difficulty distinguishing what [they were] doing as a job from what [they were] doing 'for love'" in part because their paid and unpaid care work occurred in the same space (1990:214).

In addition, the actual physical location of paid care work has been found to be relevant to the experiences of care workers. For example, Lynet Uttal and Mary Tuominen (1999:767) found that the isolated location of home-based child day care work contributed to the potential for exploitation of these care workers because they lacked the support of coworkers and so had to negotiate the terms of their labor in isolation and individually with parents, who could arrive late to pick up children without paying extra, thus extracting additional hours of care at no cost. Yet, these workers also enjoyed working at home and expressed genuine concern for the families they served (Tuominen 2000:121). Also, working in a public location does not guarantee better work conditions. In addition to the location of the care work, the employment structure of paid care work may affect the degree of exploitation experienced by the worker. Uttal and Tuominen (1999) found that, in the case of child care centers, the addition of a third party in employer-employee relations obscured the exploitative aspects of paid child care work because it distanced parents from issues regarding the workers' compensation and conditions of employment and, thus, allowed them to focus on the emotional aspects of the work instead.

The literature on care work raises questions about the interrelatedness of economic and affective relationships, the valuation and unequal distribution of care work, and the meaningfulness and exploitation of affective labor. How might paid care work contribute to a more nuanced understanding of economic and affective as intertwining? How does the political economic context in which care workers find themselves affect their own understandings of their work? My analysis of the narratives of foster mothers in US-Guatemalan transnational adoptions contributes to this literature by focusing on what the women themselves expressed about their paid care work and the tensions that arose from conflicting understandings about family and market, while also acknowledging that the tensions they expressed emerged from and were situated within a particular political economic context that has historically undervalued care work. Also, unlike day care providers, foster mothers in Guatemala provided care to their charges 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Unlike nannies and nurses, the foster mothers had legal custody of their charges and bore sole responsibility for their care and well-being. In other words, foster mothering in Guatemala provides an example of paid parenting care work. What might looking at fostering as paid care work tell us about the women's experiences and, in turn, what might their experiences reveal about paid care work? If the foster mothers align their care work with mothering, what did it mean for them to be like mothers to the children under their care? What aspects of their care work did they experience as exploitative, satisfying, or both? Did the women prioritize certain aspects of their care work over others, for example, economic over affective or vice versa? What might this tell us about their understandings of their paid care work?

<u>Emotive Language and Habitus</u>

The affective aspect of relations among people, situated within and informed by the larger political economic contexts, has been a unifying theme in the various literatures presented in this chapter. For example, forming emotional bonds with those considered kin is part of the practices of kinning, and meeting the emotional needs of others and forming affective connections with them are significant aspects of care work. In this section, I address directly the anthropological literature on emotion by providing a brief overview of the debate over how to conceptualize emotion either in term of cultural meaning or as bodily feeling, followed by a discussion of the challenges to developing an approach that gives equal merit to emotion as feeling and meaning. I then focus on the literature on the discourse of emotion and end the section with an explanation of how Bourdieu's concept of habitus serves to conceptualize the analysis of emotive language.

The anthropological literature on emotion can be broken down broadly into two overarching approaches that describe emotion in terms of either bodily feeling or cultural meaning. Prior to the 1980s scholars primarily explained emotions as feelings understood as personal, psychological, or biological (Leavitt 1996:515; Ramírez-Ferrero 2005:61). A growing interest in the cultural construction of emotions began in the 1980s (Lutz and White 1986:405). While the focus of cultural constructionist research varies—ranging from the personal self as socially constructed (Rosaldo 1984) to the cross-cultural explication of emotion vocabularies (Crespo 1986; Guarnaccia et al. 1996) to the political economic uses of emotion (Hochschild 1983; Reddy 2001)—these approaches share the view that emotions are embedded within the cultural contexts in which they are experienced and that the cultural context is what shapes and gives meaning to feelings. Yet, scholars interested in the cultural aspects of emotion often disagree about the extent to which emotions are culturally constructed. For example, by focusing

on the differences in the emotion categories of different cultures, some cross-cultural studies of

emotion have argued that emotions are not universal (Crespo 1986; Guarnaccia et al. 1996).

However, other cross-cultural studies of emotion, by highlighting the similarities in emotions

from one culture to another, have suggested that some characteristics of emotion are probably

universal (Levy 1984).

　　While cultural constructionists disagree on the extent to which emotions are culturally

shaped, they all recognize that emotions include bodily feelings as well as cultural construction.

The acknowledgement of emotion as both bodily feeling and cultural meaning is apparent in

attempts to define *emotion* as, for example, "something we do…by defining situations in a given

way" (Hochschild 1983:27); as "embodied thoughts," culturally-informed interpretations

immediately involving body, self, and identity (Rosaldo 1984:141); or as "overlearned cognitive

habits" (Reddy 2001:34). Yet, even while acknowledging that emotions are embodied, a

"constructionist" approach implies that nothing exists prior to its construction, making it easier to

overlook or minimize emotion as an equally personal, felt human experience (Lyons 1995;

Leavitt 1996:523; Reddy 1997:329). Although not inherently challenging, an approach to

emotion that attends equally to the personal and the social has proven difficult to achieve in large

part because "Western" anthropologists' notions of "emotion" continue to be informed by binary

oppositions (Leavitt 1996:515), which posit emotion as personal, natural, female, irrational,

subjective, and private and in opposition to economic relations as external, cultural, male,

rational, objective, and public (Lutz 1990:69). The previously cited definitions of emotion that

attempt to overcome such binaries instead remain informed by them. Once emotion is thought of

in terms of culture, it tends to become aligned with rational thought, as a way of cognitively

interpreting experiences.

Another problem that arises from the putative binaries of feeling and meaning, personal and social, and irrational and rational when attempting to develop an approach that addresses emotion as both personal feeling and cultural meaning has been the assumption that it is impossible to really know what another person feels internally. The alignment of emotion as thought, then, becomes a useful way to attain the unattainable. Often implicitly grounded in this assumption and in the understanding of emotion as a type of thought, recent anthropological studies on emotion have focused on that to which we do have access, namely, what people say about emotions (the discourse on emotion) and what people say that may create, describe, perform, or incite emotional responses in themselves or others (emotive language). Emotive language intertwines with other types of expression and, in so doing, may not appear to be obviously emotive (Ahmed 2004:13). For example, a person may speak "honestly" about something unrelated to emotion (e.g., "Honestly, I delivered the package on time") to express heartfeltness or sincerity (Edwards and Fasulo 2006).

The literature on the discourse of emotion has conceptualized emotions as "discursive practice" (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990:10–11), as both representation and creation of social reality (White 1990:46–47), and as an interactional process including both auditor and speaker (Brenneis 1990). Discourse-centered approaches look at emotions as cultural tools; in other words, they look at "what emotions, and talk about emotions, do in situated uses of language" (White 2005: 246–247). Since talking directly about emotions may also serve to incite emotional responses, discourse on emotion is often also emotive language (Reddy 1997). For this reason, I use the term *emotive language* to refer to both direct and indirect expression of emotion. Using emotive language as the object of analysis can help us understand emotion as part of social life and the political economy (Abu-Lughod 1990:28), for example, as a form of exploitation

(Hochschild 1983), as a vehicle of social transformation and resistance to oppression (Besnier 1990; Ramírez-Ferrero 2005), and as a political tool of the state (Good and Good 1988).

Given that the data I collected on Guatemalan foster mothers is limited to what the women expressed to me during interviews, I too find the concept of emotive language a useful methodological framework for analyzing the social and political economic aspects of the foster mothers' care work. However, I am equally concerned with doing justice to the personal as individually felt in addition to the personal as social, that is, to how the foster mothers themselves understood and made sense of their experiences (Ramírez-Ferrero 2005). As previously discussed, approaches that understand emotion in terms of thought, expressed through language, have tended to be based on the assumption that we can never really know what another person feels. The challenge, then, becomes how to attend to the feelings of individuals experienced as their own and, at the same time, understand these feelings to be unintelligible outside of the cultural context in which they are experienced and to which their meaning derives. While to a certain extent the assumption is true, it only becomes problematic for understanding another's experience of emotion within the binary framework that such an approach attempts to overcome. Yet, as John Leavitt precisely explains, "while we do not know what someone else is feeling, this is true only in the same sense that we do not know absolutely what someone else means when he or she says something. In both cases we interpret: we postulate meanings for the words, gestures, or tears" (1996:530). In other words, emotions can be understood to be just as clearly expressed through language (verbal or non-verbal) as thoughts are. Emotive language, then, may also serve as an effective methodology for interpreting how people feel about their lived experiences.

Bringing Pierre Bourdieu's work on habitus into conversation with emotive language provides a way to conceptualize how emotive language functions both to express personal experiences and to perpetuate unequal structures of power. Although Bourdieu's notion of "habitus" has been credited with giving constructionists a way to bring back a lived body into their theories on emotion (Leavitt 1996), few analytic approaches to emotion have applied his concepts directly (Reed-Danahay 2005:99). Bourdieu defines *habitus* as a "system of durable, transposable dispositions," simultaneously a social construction and the impetus for the reproduction of that construction (1977:72). Dispositions are the ways individuals act, think, and feel and are acquired, often unconsciously, through the practices of everyday life. Examples of dispositions include habits, beliefs, ritual, bodily postures, tastes, feelings, and language. Habitus, reproduced through dispositions, is everything the members of a group intuit about the social system and about acting within it (practical knowledge), even when they do not know they know (doxic knowledge) or how they came to know it. Within this framework, emotion and emotive language may be understood as dispositions (Reed-Danahay 2005:102). Although the concept of habitus has been criticized for being structurally deterministic, Bourdieu's habitus was an attempt to synthesize objective and subjective approaches to research and he understood habitus as an "open" concept that allows for individual choice and changes to the structure (Bourdieu 1977:6; Swartz 1997:212; Reed-Danahay 2005:101). Emotive language as disposition, then, allows for the analysis of emotion as expression of personal experiences.

Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" also is useful for the analysis of how emotive language serves to reproduce social and political economic inequalities. Doxa, the taken-for-granted aspect of habitus, allows for the reproduction of power and inequalities in the system. Through "misrecognition"—the conflation of objective dichotomies (e.g., have–have not) with subjective

ones (e.g. good–bad)—individuals neutralize objective inequalities, associating, for example, "have" with "good" (Bourdieu 1977:97). These misrecognitions naturalize dichotomies of inclusion and exclusion, reproducing power structures (Swartz 1997:84). Although Sara Ahmed (2004) does not refer to Bourdieu in her work on the "emotionality of texts," her description of emotive language in many ways supports emotion as disposition. As Ahmed explains, emotions operate "precisely where we don't register their effects, in the determination of the relationship between signs, a relation that is often concealed by the form of the relation" (2004:194). In addition, emotive language often differentiates between the subject and object of feeling, which may serve to legitimize some and exclude others (Ahmed 2004:13). In other words, doxa, the commonsense assumptions that inform emotive language, serve to reproduce habitus and may also reproduce structural inequalities through misrecognition. For example, in the case of transnational adoption, a foster mother may describe the biological mother's act of relinquishment as inconceivable and explain it as lack of love for the child. In this example, the foster mother legitimizes her own love of the child while negating the birth mother's capacity to love. Furthermore, by ignoring the possible structural reasons behind the birth mother's decision to relinquish the child, such as poverty or violence, the foster mother unconsciously misrecognizes objective poverty as subjective bad mothering.

Emotive language as part of habitus, then, is a useful framework for understanding the misrecognition and social reproduction of inequalities as well as the personal experiences of individuals. The dichotomies that serve to reproduce habitus also inform the ways we experience and express our emotions. We experience emotion as both mind and body, but understand and express our emotive experiences, in large part, within the dichotomies reproduced through habitus. That is, emotion and emotive language both surpass and are informed by putative

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dichotomies. The dichotomies help us make sense of and find meaning, even satisfaction, in our experiences. Yet, despite misrecognition, habitus is also flexible in that it contains ambiguities that allow for multiple interpretations (Bourdieu 1977:141). Potential exists for taken-for-granted knowledge to become explicit, allowing people to assess, question, and change the once unquestionable structures of inequality. As a flexible, yet still durable, disposition, emotive language expresses and reflects people's meaningful experiences as well as the underlying social, cultural, and political economic context in which they are expressed.

The literature on the anthropology of emotion raises important questions about what it means to think and feel, how to conceptualize emotion in a way that allows anthropological research to get at the internal emotions of others, the extent to which emotion is culturally shaped or constructed, and how emotion is part of political economy. In terms of the current project on foster mothers in Guatemala, the anthropology of emotion, and of emotive language specifically, raise questions about what the women's emotive language tells us about their understandings of and place within the adoption process. For example, how did the foster mothers use emotive language to express their feelings about, and make sense of, their care work? What is the relationship between the subjective and objective conditions of care work? How do the women's subjective understandings of paid care work inform their understandings and evaluation of the objective conditions? What purpose does (mis)recognition serve in the women's narratives?

<u>The Liminality, Ambiguity, and
Ambivalence of Care Work</u>

Given the multiple dichotomies that inform our understandings of paid foster care work—such as care versus work, kin versus non-kin, and family versus market—I find the concept of "liminality" to be a useful framework for analyzing how paid foster care workers experienced their care work. Borrowing from the work of Arnold van Gennep (1960) on the

"liminal phase" of rites of passages, Turner (1967) further developed the concept of liminality to analyze the temporary, transitional phase of rituals within tribal systems. In the liminal phase, participants are separated from a previous social state, but have not yet been, and may never be, incorporated into a new state. They are liminal because they do not fit within normative cultural classifications and, as such, are ambiguous. In Turner's oft quoted words, liminal persons "are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between" normative cultural classifications (1977[1969]:95). Yet, "betwixt and between" does not adequately summarize Turner's conception of liminal persons, as they may also be both one thing and another. According to Turner, "transitional beings…are neither one thing nor another; *or may be both*" (1967:97; emphasis added). Turner later adds, the "coincidence of opposite processes and notions in a single representation characterizes the peculiar unity of the liminal: that which is neither this nor that, *and yet both*" (1967:99; emphasis added). In other words, the concept of liminality includes the separation from culturally constructed opposites—the neither/nor—as well as the unity of these putative opposites, what I will refer to as "bothness."

Several scholars have drawn from Turner's concept of liminality to analyze the experiences of temporary workers (Garsten 1999), unpaid caregivers (Kelly 2008), the chronically ill (Honkasalo 2001), and paid care workers (Zadoroznyj 2009). Two themes emerging from this literature that are especially pertinent to my current project are liminality as a permanent condition and the emotional aspects of liminality. Turner acknowledged the possibility of the transitional state of liminality becoming a permanent, institutionalized condition of society (Turner 1977[1969]:107). Contemporary studies on liminality and care and work have contributed to an understanding of liminality as a potentially permanent condition or space. For example, despite the obviously temporary nature of temporary employees ("temps")

within a given organization, Christina Garsten (1999:607) asserts that the liminality of temps may actually be experienced as a more permanent condition since many of the workers continue to temp through temp agencies for other organizations, never becoming permanently employed at any one organization. Angela Kelly (2008) also found liminality to be as a permanent condition of people caring for those with AIDS dementia. The loss and grief they continued to feel was what made their liminality a permanent "way of life" (Kelly 2008:335). In these studies, liminality becomes permanent because a particular aspect of the work is permanent (e.g., they continue to perform temp work elsewhere) or is experienced as permanent (e.g., they continue to grieve). Few studies, however, address liminality as potentially permanent within the context of the experiences of paid care workers. My study of paid foster care workers in Guatemala provides such a context. Is the concept of liminality applicable to the position of Guatemalan foster mothers? Did these care workers experience their fostering as temporary, as permanent, or as a mixture of these? How might the experiences of paid care workers contribute to our understanding of liminality in terms of permanency?

This literature on the permanency of liminality also lacks an explicit discussion of transition, that is, of what would be required for a transition out of liminality in these contexts. Although an understanding of liminality as permanent may seem to suggest the impossibility of transition in the traditional sense—as either returning to one's original status or moving on to a new status (Turner 1977[1969]), Maria Zadoroznyj's (2009) article on new mothers' uncertainties about how to conceptualize the services of postnatal home care workers provides an alternative sense of transition. Zadoroznyj suggests that any transition out of a permanently liminal position would be dependent on changes in the underlying cultural meanings of the dichotomies that define the positions as liminal in the first place, for example, the categories of

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unpaid, private care versus paid, public work in her case of postnatal home care workers. The potential for the transition out of seemingly permanent liminality importantly emphasizes liminal positions as social constructs. Although focusing on the perceptions of the mothers using the services of the care workers allows Zadoroznyj to highlight the social construction of the liminality of paid care workers, her focus on the mothers fails to take into account the workers' own understandings of their care work and how those understandings are informed, or not, by the mothers' and society's perceptions of them. My research on the experiences of paid foster care workers is an attempt to address these issues by focusing on both the social and individual aspects of liminality within a contemporary context of potentially permanent liminality.

Related to the question of permanency, the emotional aspect of liminality is a salient theme of the medical anthropological literature on liminality (Honkasalo 2001; Kelly 2008), which emphasizes the individual, social, and political aspects of liminality. For example, through her discussion of the "living loss" experienced by caregivers, Kelly (2008:339) explores liminality as an internal, psychosocial space by addressing the social and emotional landscape of the intimate experience of those living within the liminal space. In other words, internally experienced liminality (in this case, living loss) occurs within the context of relationships and, as such, is an intersubjective experience. Drawing from the literature on the discourse of emotion as a way to get at this internal space, Kelly (2008:339) conceptualizes living loss as a discourse concerned with a particular experience of emotion. By considering the emotive language of liminal persons, Kelly's framework advances our understanding of the emotional aspects of an individual's experience of liminality and, in turn, how this personal experience is interrelated with and informed by cultural meanings and social relationships. My research attempts to advance our understanding of the emotive characteristics of liminality further by introducing the

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political economic, as well as the social and individual, aspects of the emotive language of paid care workers.

I now return to the main aspect of liminality, that is, ambiguity. According to Turner, liminality is "necessarily ambiguous" (1977[1969]:95), since ambiguities are what define something as liminal. As such, a discussion about liminality necessitates a discussion of ambiguity and, since we have now added the emotional aspects of liminality to the discussion, the related concept of ambivalence. Yet, much of the literature on liminality addresses the ambiguous nature of the particular liminal position at hand without an in-depth discussion of how the concept of ambiguity works with liminality within the particular context (Garsten 1999; Zadoroznyj 2009). Interestingly, even those scholars who emphasize the emotive aspects of liminality do not address directly the concept of ambivalence (Honkasalo 2001; Kelly 2008). In turn, the literature on the ambiguity and ambivalence of kinship (Peletz 2001) and adoption (Wegar 1992) do not address liminality. My research brings together these related discussions of liminality, ambiguity, and ambivalence in an attempt to better understand the relationship of these concepts within the experiences of people whose positions are liminal.

The dictionary definition of *ambiguity* is that which is "capable of being understood in more senses than one" or that which is "doubtful or uncertain" (Funk and Wagnalls 1993:19). In other words, ambiguity occurs when it is unclear to which socially- or culturally-derived category a "thing" pertains, since it could pertain to several. Ambivalence is "the simultaneous experience of powerful, contradictory emotions or attitudes toward a single phenomena" (Peletz 2001:413). On the surface then, ambivalence differs from ambiguity in that ambivalence arises from emotional feelings, while ambiguity arises from culturally-informed cognitive thoughts (Peletz 2001:415). However, the analytic distinction between ambiguity and ambivalence

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becomes blurred when the concept of "emotion" is understood as both internal feeling and socially constructed cognitive thought (as previously discussed). Ambiguity may cultivate ambivalence and ambivalence may cultivate ambiguity (Peletz 2001:415). That is, what is understood as internal ambivalence toward a phenomenon may stem from conflicting culturally-informed notions about the phenomenon understood as ambiguous. As such, considering ambivalence as purely personal is misguided because ambivalence reflects broader cultural frameworks of meaning (Wegar 1992).

Given the interrelated nature of ambivalence and ambiguity, we would expect ambivalence to be a prevalent aspect of liminality. The inclusion of ambivalence to the discussion of liminality should serve to emphasize how the personal is social, but also how the social is interpreted within the experiences of individuals. In Guatemala, paid foster care workers' positions are necessarily ambiguous because they can be understood as both caring and economic, and as both kin-like and non-kin, within a context in which such cultural notions are understood as separate categories. While cultural ambiguities may frame care workers' narratives about their paid care work, does this necessarily mean that they themselves felt ambivalent toward parts of the adoption process, their care work, or relationships established during their care work? If so, what does this tell us about their understandings of their position? If not, how did they understand and make sense of their experiences? How might applying the concept of liminality to the care work of foster mothers in Guatemala expand our understanding of how liminality, ambiguity, and ambivalence relate?

The final aspect of liminality pertinent to the discussion at hand is the sociopolitical function of liminality. For Turner, liminality often served a sociopolitical purpose, what he referred to as *communitas* (1977[1969]:96). Within the context of rituals, liminal phenomena

juxtapose two differing "'models' for human interrelatedness," one of society as a structured, hierarchical system of differentiated positions, and one of society as an unstructured "*comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals" (Turner 1977[1969]:96). In other words, liminal phenomena strengthen, if only temporarily, a sense of community and equality, which ultimately serves to maintain the structure. Although contemporary examples of liminality tend to omit (Kelly 2008; Zadoroznyj 2009) or dismiss (Garsten 1999) communitas as irrelevant to the particular context of their research, and while none of the cases of (care) workers appears to engender a sense of community, they do, to varying degrees, address the social and sociopolitical aspect of liminality. However, they do not explicitly discuss how liminality works sociopolitically.

I suggest that pairing Turner's concept of liminality with Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, doxa, reproduction, and misrecognition (as previously defined) might serve as a useful framework for getting at how liminality works in terms of political economy. Both Turner (1967; 1977[1969]) and Bourdieu (1977) are concerned with how sociopolitical structures are maintained or reproduced, the former through communitas and the latter through habitus. Both scholars' work also relies on an examination of cultural dichotomies or categories, Turner's through the ambiguous nature of liminality and Bourdieu's through the process of misrecognition. Despite this, few anthropologists have brought together the works of Turner and Bourdieu (Ghannam 2011). How might looking at foster care work as a liminal position contribute to our understanding of how liminality and social reproduction inform one another? How might liminality highlight the coexistence of recognition and misrecognition as ways of making sense of our place in the world? What is the relationship between the reproduction of doxa and the liminality of the women's work? In turn, how might the concept of liminality add to

our knowledge of foster mothers' understanding of their paid care work, of the alienation of their labor, and of the putative dichotomies defining their care work as liminal?

<u>Paid Foster Care Work in US-Guatemala</u>
<u>Transnational Adoption</u>

The chapters that follow seek to understand how Guatemalan foster mothers experienced and made sense of their seemingly liminal paid care work within the political economic context of Guatemala and transnational adoption in which their experiences occurred. I bring together the theoretical tools of liminality, emotive language, and habitus in an attempt to illuminate the women's experiences as socially shaped and socially shaping, while remaining also deeply personal.

Chapter 2, *US-Guatemalan Transnational Adoption: Context and Methodology*, lays the groundwork for the chapters of analysis that follow. I begin the chapter with a brief summary of the sociopolitical history from which US-Guatemalan adoptions arose, including issues of racism, exploitation, war, poverty, class, gender, and social services within Guatemala. I then provide an overview of US-Guatemalan transnational adoption, the abuses associated with it, and Guatemalans perceptions toward adoption, as well as descriptions of key people involved in the adoption process: lawyers, intermediaries, adoptive parents, children and their biological parents, and foster mothers. I conclude the chapter with details regarding the current study, including the structure of the interviews, a description of the general characteristics of the foster mothers I interviewed, and my methodology for analyzing the women's narratives.

Chapters 3 through 6 are analyses of my interviews with foster mothers in Guatemala. Although I argue that the economic and affective are not mutually exclusive concepts and are intertwined in daily experiences, I nevertheless find it analytically useful first to distinguish them, to the extent possible, before discussing the ways in which they relate. Chapters 3 and 4

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focus on the affective aspects of the women's care of the children. Chapters 5 and 6 address the economic aspects of foster care work, while chapter 6 also more directly ties together the affective and the economic.

Chapter 3, *Like a Mother to her Children: The Bothness of Fostering*, examines the foster mothers' understandings of their relationships with the children under their care. I analyze the women's frequent use of the phrase *como si fuera su mamá* (as if I were their mother, even though I was not), as an expression of both similarity—the ways in which they were like mothers to the children under their care—and difference—the ways in which they were not mothers to these children. The chapter begins with an analysis of the women's understandings of kinship, mothering specifically, in terms of the putative dichotomy of biological versus social, followed by a discussion of how the women described their relationships with the children as being similar to that of a mother in terms of physical and emotional closeness and how the women also described their relationships with the children as being different from that of a mother in terms of the temporary and non-kin nature of the relationships. The chapter ends with an examination of the meaning of the seeming contradictions in the women's narratives regarding the issues of children's sleeping arrangements and *la entrega*, the day the children left their foster homes to join their adoptive parents, as salient moments that highlight many of the ambiguities involved with foster care work. I suggest that these seeming contradictions express what I refer to as a "bothness," rather than an ambivalence, toward their relationship with the children for whom they cared.

Chapter 4, *Better, Best, and Better Best: The Foster Mothers in Relation to the Biological Mothers and Adoptive Parents*, addresses the question of how the foster mothers, given the liminal position of their care work, situated their own capacity to provide socioeconomic and

affective care to the children in comparison to the biological and adoptive parents. I apply Bourdieu's concepts of "misrecognition" and "social reproduction" as a way to place the women's comparisons of the various caregivers within the larger transnational context in which they occurred and to understand what purpose such comparisons may have served. Centered on the foster mothers' frequent use of the words *mejor* (better) and *lo mejor* (best) when describing the children's future in the United States, I begin the chapter with an analysis of the foster mothers' comparisons among the biological mothers', adoptive parents', and their own capacities to provide care to the children. Focusing on the foster mothers' expressions of hope, I then examine the women's evaluations of the adoptive parents' affective care as the best, followed by how they also expressed uncertainty and ambivalence about this "best." In conclusion, I suggest that the foster mothers' use of the comparative words *better* and *best* to evaluate one's capacity to provide affective care to the children reflected the ways in which they both acknowledged and misrecognized socioeconomic inequalities among the different caregivers in an attempt to make sense of and feel good about their own liminal position as temporary care workers.

Chapter 5, *The Truth of the Matter: The Subjectivity of the Objective Conditions of Paid Foster Care Work*, addresses fostering as a type of liminal paid care work that brings to the fore the connection between the economic and the affective. I bring together Turner's concept of "liminality" with Bourdieu's concept of "doxa," the taken-for-granted aspects of habitus, as a way to explain the women's expressions of unease about their care work as paid employment and their attempts to mitigate this unease. The chapter begins with an analysis of the foster mothers' subjective understandings about their care work by looking at the justificatory ways in which they talked about the economic aspects of their work in relation to the affective aspects of it. The second half of the chapter examines how the subjective understandings regarding paid

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work and mothering served to reproduce the objective conditions of foster care work and informed the women's assessment of the fairness of such conditions. I first lay out the objective conditions of the women's employment, then use the example of how some of the women assessed their wages as fair to demonstrate how subjective understandings about foster care work served to frame and reproduce the seemingly objective conditions of their employment.

Chapter 6, *"It's a Life We're Talking About:" The Fulfilling and Alienating Work of Paid Foster Care*, addresses the foster mothers' awareness of and resistance to the market aspects of transnational adoption in Guatemala. The first half of the chapter addresses the women's recognition of the ways in which the adoption system functioned like a type of market. I lay out the aspects of foster care work that marked fostering as undeniably a job for these women, namely, their employers' exploitative treatment of them. I then analyze the women's remarks about their employers' treatment of the children—focusing on the women's awareness of employers' misappropriation of adoption fees, payments to biological mothers, and refusals to provide adequate material and medical resources—in terms of commodification and reproduction of doxa. The section half of the chapter deals with the ways in which the foster mothers also resisted their exploitation and the commodification of the children, refusing to treat adoption as a market. I address the women's resistance to the commodification of children through their resistance to the commodification of their own affective labor by returning to and reframing two of the themes raised in chapter 3: the children's sleeping arrangements and the day the children left (la entrega). I conclude the chapter with an explanation of how the commodification of women's labor interrelates with the commodification of children and, as a result, how the women's resistance to the alienation of their affective labor was also resistance to the commodification of children. Chapter 7, *Reflecting on Foster Care Work: Closure and*

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Concluding Remarks, provides a summary of key findings of my analysis of the foster mothers'

narratives and a discussion of the contributions of my research and implications for future

research.

CHAPTER 2

US-GUATEMALAN TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTIONS:

CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

Paid foster care work in Guatemala arose from the surge in transnational adoptions. Total

adoptions in Guatemala increased dramatically, from fewer than 500 between 1980 and 1990, to

5,577 in 2007, of which only two percent were domestic adoptions (Casa Alianza et al. 2007).

The remaining 98 percent of Guatemalan adoptions were transnational, mainly to the United

States, France, Spain, Canada, and Italy. I focus specifically on adoptions from Guatemala to the

United States for two main reasons. First, by 2002 four of the five main receiving countries had

ceased accepting children from Guatemala due to the country's failure to implement standards

compliant with international law and due to increased reports of child trafficking and other

irregularities in the processing of adoptions (Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en

Guatemala 2010:25; Dubinsky 2010:108). The United States alone continued to allow its citizens

to adopt children from Guatemala. As a result, the US had a greater impact on the Guatemalan

system of adoption than other countries. Although the US had always received the largest

percentage of Guatemalan children adopted out of the country per year, after 2002 nearly all

Guatemalan children adopted transnationally came to the United States (Casa Alianza et al.

2007:33; Dubinksy 2010:108).[4]

While proponents of US-Guatemalan adoptions stressed the important function of

adoption to provide homes for needy children, critics emphasized the corrupting effect of money

on the Guatemalan adoption system, often referring to it as a "baby market." They argued that

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[4] In the ten year period from 1997 to 2006, 87 percent of Guatemalan children adopted out of country went to the United States, while only 5.4 percent went to France, 1.5 percent to Spain, 1.2 percent to Canada, and 0.8 percent to Italy. In 2006, the percentage of total Guatemalan transnational adoptions that went to the United States rose to 98.3 percent (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:25).

some of the children were reproduced to meet the demand created by the desire of prospective parents to adopt children abroad (Casa Alianza et al. 2007). Both proponents and critics of transnational adoption from Guatemala to the US had it right to some extent. Adoption to the United States certainly provided loving families for many Guatemalan children, the exchange of money was a necessary part of the process, and some adoptions were tied to criminal activities and greed. In response to growing domestic and international unrest over increasing reports of illegal and unethical adoption practices, the processing of new US-Guatemalan adoption cases officially ended December 31, 2007.

Political, economic, and affective relationships were intricately interwoven in the US-Guatemalan adoption process. The personal experiences of foster mothers, who provided intimate care for children awaiting adoption and who were also an integral part of the adoption market, present a unique perspective in which to better understand such complex relationships. The factors that contributed to the increase in transnational adoptions from Guatemala were complex and, according to Laura Briggs, "invested with colonial legacies" (2006:348). The conditions contributing to the growth of transnational adoptions in Guatemala, the reasons why prospective adoptive parents in the United States decided to adopt from Guatemala in increasing numbers, and the reasons why so many Guatemalan children were available for adoption, then, can only be understood within the context of Guatemala's tumultuous history of racism, economic exploitation, and war, and its contentious relationship with the United States.

This chapter begins with a summary of the political economic context from which US-Guatemalan adoptions and paid private-sector fostering arose, and ends with a discussion of the research methods used in the current study. I begin the chapter with a historical overview of race and exploitation in Guatemala, followed by a discussion of the class and gender issues defining

poverty in Guatemala. I then provide a brief history of US-Guatemalan transnational adoption

and the abuses associated with it, followed by descriptions of the people most salient to the

current project: adoption lawyers, intermediaries, adoptive parents, Guatemalan children and

their biological parents, and private-sector foster mothers. I conclude the chapter with details

regarding the current study, including the structure of the interviews, a description of the general

characteristics of the foster mothers I interviewed, and my methodology for analyzing the

women's narratives.

<u>A Brief History of Race, Exploitation,</u>
<u>and Violence in Guatemala</u>

The population of Guatemala is estimated at over fourteen million (Instituto Nacional de

Estadísticas 2010), broadly divided into three racialized ethnicities: Ladinos (60 percent),

indigenous (40 percent), and Afro-Caribbean (less than one percent) (Instituto Nacional de

Estadísticas 2010). The term *Ladino* includes the small number considered white and of

European descent, but is mostly comprised of those considered of mixed European-indigenous

ancestry. The term *indigenous* refers to people who identify as Mayan or any of the other 22

indigenous linguistic groups. The term *Afro-Caribbean* refers to the Garifuna population,

descendants of slaves shipwrecked in St. Vincent and later deported by the Spaniards to

Honduras, Belize, and Guatemala's coastal town of Livingston, where they lived largely isolated

for much of Guatemala's history. Contemporary relations between the two primary racialized

ethnicities—Ladino and indigenous—are rooted in a history of racism and exploitation, dating

back to the arrival of the Spaniards in the early 1500s.

Racism has been persistent throughout Guatemala's history and has been expressed

through economic exploitation and physical violence against the indigenous populations. The

Maya civilization had inhabited the region now known as Guatemala since about 2000 BCE,

developing city-states, building ceremonial centers, and creating mathematical, astronomical, and hieroglyphic writing systems. When the Spaniards arrived, they burned the cities, took land, and banned indigenous religion and culture. The native population in the eastern part of Guatemala was nearly obliterated during the conquest. During the colonial period (1521–1821), Spaniards established mining and indigo plantations in the east, further disrupting and, in some cases, wiping out entirely what remained of the pre-conquest native peasant communities. The native populations in the west of Guatemala were also reduced during the conquest, but, in contrast to the east, during the colonial period the Spaniards largely ignored the rural areas of the west, allowing the native populations to maintain their pre-conquest socioeconomic structure of closed corporate peasant communities and their cultural beliefs and practices (Smith 1984:197–200). However, the west was not completely unaffected by colonial rule. Given the scarcity of available labor in the east, Spaniards relied on slaves taken from the west to work the mines and plantations.

The use of the indigenous and peasant populations as cheap sources of labor did not end with Guatemala's independence from Spain in 1821. Within fifty years, the new government had implemented reforms to support a major export-oriented coffee plantation economy in western Guatemala, which included a heavy reliance on peasant labor to build infrastructure and a land policy that promoted the private acquisition of communal lands (Smith 1984:200–201). As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, scarcity of land forced many highland peasants to live on small plots on larger farms owned by wealthy Ladinos, who required tenants to migrate to their coastal coffee, sugar, or cotton plantations to work and live in dismal conditions (Manz 2004:37). Public officials and plantation foremen made labor compulsory for nearby indigenous communities, enforced by corporal punishment, imprisonment, and rape (Grandin 2004:32).

These migrations disrupted families, work at home, and children's education (Manz 2004:39).

The year 1944 brought the October Revolution, a conflict between revolutionaries intent on labor

law reforms and planters reliant on low wage labor (Grandin 2004:38). Although forced labor

laws were abolished, reforms had little impact on local peasant communities since plantation

owners responded by offering very low wages (Smith 1984:210–211).

Economic exploitation was perpetuated by the dominant group's contempt toward the

indigenous population. Since colonial times, Guatemala's European and Ladino rulers have

struggled with the so-called "Indian problem." From their perspective, the problem was how to

advance the country with such a large indigenous population, whom they perceived to represent

"the antithesis of what a cosmopolitan society should be," namely, backwardness, ignorance, and

peasantry (Fischer and Benson 2006:143–144). Conservatives promoted a policy of social and

geographic separation, but liberals promoted integration, arguing "that separation thwarted the

development of an educated, ethnically homogenous population that would ensure political

stability" (Fischer and Benson 2006:143–144). The debate over separation or integration

continues to this day. Since both sides of the debate are defined by an understanding of

indigenous as problematic, central government policies, whether conservative or liberal, have

often resulted in neglect or abuse of the rural, indigenous population. For example, the

government has failed to implement policies and allocate sufficient funding to improve or

develop rural living and work conditions, infrastructure, schools, and other social services (Manz

2004:43). Racism has also been supported by the government as a matter of explicit policy and

action. The government's actions and policies during the country's civil war most saliently

demonstrate the extent of violence and discrimination against the country's rural, largely

indigenous, populations.

From 1960 to 1996, Guatemala faced a civil war that exacerbated poverty, the disruption

of families, and violence against civilians. Although the war was supposedly in response to

guerrilla insurgents, the army led an extensive "scorched earth campaign" against civilians that

included razing entire communities, genocide, rape, and other human rights abuses (Grandin

2004:3; Manz 2004). The social and cultural consequences of the violence of the civil war

included displacement and uprooting of indigenous communities. In 1982 the Guatemalan

government headed by General Efraín Ríos Montt began a "model village" program, which

resettled thousands of people displaced by the violence into new government-controlled

hamlets—often built over the ashes of villages it had destroyed—and a "beans and bullets"

program, providing food and protection for those under its watch (Davis 1988:7; Manz

2004:143, 155). Although the government framed these programs as social services to assist

displaced communities, in reality their aim was to sever ties between insurgents and their

supporters. The implementation of these programs coincided with the bloodiest 18 months of the

civil war. The army tortured and murdered civilians, including children. It also eviscerated

pregnant women, whose fetuses they considered potential future insurgents, and castrated men

(Manz 2004:103–104; Fischer and Benson 2006:96).

In all, an estimated 200,000 people disappeared or were killed (Grandin 2004:3; Manz

2004:3), 40–80,000 women were widowed, and 150–250,000 children lost at least one parent as

a result of the war (Green 1995). Thousands of rural Guatemalans left native communities for the

hills, Guatemala city slums, or refugee camps in Mexico, and began migrating to the United

States in large numbers (Davis 1988:36; Manz 2004:235); they did not know the whereabouts of

their family members or whether they were alive or dead (Davis 1988:27). Some of these

children, "saved" from massacres, were extrajudicially adopted by soldiers or taken to their

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homes as servants (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:19). In addition to physical violence, the

Guatemalan military, with the backing of the state, attempted to destroy Mayan cohesiveness by

creating a "culture of fear" through their use of psychological tactics to control populations

(Davis 1988: 21; Green 1999). For example, as a means of control, the military used violence

against children to instill fear (Dubinsky 2010:105–106). The military also planted rumors, used

Mayan boys as foot soldiers, and created civil patrols that coerced local men to participate in

violence against neighbors and relatives, to undermine trust and cooperation among villagers and

within families (Green 1999:31; Manz 2004:112, 127, 161). According to Linda Green, the

resulting distrust and fear "led to severe rupture in family and community social relations…as

family members themselves [were] implicated in the acts of violence" (1999:31).

Although the civil war officially ended in 1996 with the signing of the peace agreement

between the guerilla organization and the Guatemalan government, Guatemalans continue to live

with the effects of past violence. According to Beatriz Manz, the psychological mark left by past

violence, which included systemic violence against children, "may be transformed, reshaped, at

times repressed, but it stays with those traumatized by the experience" (2004:246). The violence

and coercive use of fear also continue through the actions of clandestine groups, gangs,

kidnappers, drug traffickers, and the police (Fischer and Benson 2006:92–93). Violent crimes are

perpetuated by continued economic hardship as well as a general lawlessness grounded in

decades of violence and disregard for human life (Manz 2004:235).

Violence is also perpetuated by almost complete impunity for all perpetrators of violent

crimes (97 percent) (Centro de Estudios de Guatemala 2009). For example, the number of

homicides per year rose to 6,292 in 2008 (of which 497 were children), but only 273 people were

sentenced (Centro de Estudios de Guatemala 2009). Although security forces continue to serve

the interests of the powerful, the extent of impunity in Guatemala is in large part a result of authorities' failure to investigate crime and prosecute suspects, due to a weak and corrupt police force, an incapable justice system, and a lack of policies on and funding for security and criminal investigations (Centro de Estudios de Guatemala 2009).

The violent death, disappearance, and migration of thousands of Guatemalans during the civil war left many children orphaned or without homes, explaining to a large extent the initial availability of Guatemalan children for adoption. Transnational adoptions from Guatemala arose from this history of racism, war, and economic exploitation, and (unwittingly) became part of the violence (Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala 2010), a point on which I will elaborate in a later section.

Class, Gender, and Social Services in Guatemala

Poverty and unequal access to economic opportunities are other factors contributing to the surge in Guatemalan transnational adoptions. Guatemala has the second-most unequal income distribution in Latin America with 51 percent of the total population living below the national poverty line (Miller and Hinman 2006:7). The richest ten percent of Guatemalans hold 42.99 percent of income, while the poorest 40 percent of the population hold only 10.6 percent (Miller and Hinman 2006:7). Such unequal distribution of wealth is a major factor in explaining biological parents' decisions to relinquish their children and foster mothers' decisions to work as child care providers during the adoption process. For example, the majority of Guatemalan women who relinquished their children for adoption reportedly did so because of "their precarious economic situation" (ILPEC 2000:20–21). Identifying poverty as "the" reason for relinquishment, however, belies the racial and gender discrimination that shapes poverty in Guatemala.

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Class in Guatemala, according to Carol Smith, is "inextricably bound up with constructions of race" (1995:733). The country's political and economic elite are overwhelmingly Ladino, while a vast majority of the poor are indigenous people (Fischer and Benson 2006:52). The poverty rate for Ladinos is 38 percent in comparison to an overwhelming 74 percent for indigenous Guatemalans (Miller and Hinman 2006). These numbers highlight the degree of economic division between Guatemala's two main racialized ethnicities, but also reveal that not all indigenous people are the poorest of the poor (26 percent are above the poverty line) and not all Ladinos are privileged or wealthy (38 percent are below the poverty line). Yet, despite income variation within ethnic groups, cultural understandings regarding class remain closely identified with ethnicity. Ladinos continue to view indigenous populations as lower class, as do the majority of indigenous Guatemalans who see class as part of what differentiates them from Ladinos (Smith 1995:734; Little 2004:158). Economic differences among Ladinos also remain largely grounded in understandings about racialized ethnicities. Although the Guatemalan government, as well as general language usage, now use the term *Ladino* to refer to people of both predominantly European ancestry and mixed European- indigenous ancestry, those of predominantly European ancestry, once referred to as *criollos* (creoles), continue to distinguish themselves from those of mixed ancestry and continue to clearly make up Guatemala's ruling upper class (Smith 1995:734).

In this racialized class structure, then, Ladinos of mixed ancestry are considered to be intermediate between Guatemala's elites and indigenous and, thus, of the middle class (Smith 1995:734). According to Smith, Ladinos of the middle- and lower-middle class tend to support the dominant ideology of the small upper-class elite that also exploits them, because this dominant ideology "allows them to identify with creoles vis-à-vis Guatemala's Maya Indians"

(1995:734). Numerical information on class in Guatemala, particularly information about the middle class, is scarce. Roughly based on the statistical information on income distribution and poverty rates, I estimate that no more than 45 percent of Ladinos are middle class, broadly defined.[5] For the purposes of the current study, I use the terms *middle class* to reflect 1) that the person's or group's economic status falls somewhere between the wealthy elite and the poor majority and 2) that they culturally align themselves with at least some of the dominant ideologies of the upper class. Guatemalan foster mothers appear to fit within this definition of the middle class.[6]

In addition to intertwined racial and class inequalities, employment figures reflect gender inequalities in Guatemala. The percentage of the adult population that was economically active in 2006 was 67 percent, but the rate for women was only 48 percent in comparison to 88 percent for men (World Bank). For those who are employed, the wage gaps are wide and favor men, non-indigenous, and urban over women, indigenous, and rural, indicating "discriminatory practices in Guatemalan labor markets" (Ñopo and Gonzales 2008:37–39). Interestingly, although average wages in urban areas were almost twice as much as wages in rural areas, the gender wage gap for both was 18 percent (World Bank), demonstrating an overarching bias against women (Miller and Hinman 2006).

The gendered wage gap can be explained, in part, by participation in the informal sector, which tends to pay only a third of the wages paid by formal sector jobs (International Food Policy Research Institute 2003). Although Guatemala had a national minimum monthly wage—

[5] This estimate is most certainly high, as I calculated the number based on the percentage of the Ladino population not part of Guatemala's richest 10 percent (approximately 17 percent of the Ladino population) and not below the poverty line (38 percent of the population). However, I suspect that incomes within the remaining 45 percent of Ladinos vary widely, placing some in or more closely within the upper class and others in or more closely within the lower class, but I was unable to locate data to delineate this further.

[6] One report on adoption in Guatemala describes foster mothers as middle- to lower-middle class (ILPEC 2000:24), as does Karen Dubinsky (2010:112) in her book on transnational adoption.

1587 quetzales (US$208) for nonagricultural work in 2006, the minimum wage was insufficient to meet the basic needs of families, even when two parents worked. In addition, enforcement of the law is lax and noncompliance is widespread, especially in the informal sector (US Department of State 2006). Approximately 75 percent of Guatemala's workforce is employed by the informal sector, of which women are disproportionately represented (Chant 2003:218, 224; US Department of State 2006). For example, the majority of urban women worked in low-paying occupations in the informal sector (International Food Policy Research Institute 2003). Yet, employed urban women still fared better on average than rural employees, whose average monthly wages were significantly less: 1650 quetzales (US$215) for urban women in comparison to 854 quetzales (US$111) for rural women (Ñopo and Gonzales 2008:7–8).

While employment statistics highlight the extent and distribution of gender discrimination in Guatemala, they do not provide an explanation for the existence of gender inequality. Unequal employment opportunities for women in Guatemala are grounded in gendered ideologies regarding work and family. As discussed in the previous chapter, gendered ideals of family in Latin America have generally depicted men as the sole economic provider of the household and women as loving, faithful mothers and housewives, the primary providers of emotional support and care, and dependent on men's income (Stølen 1996:176; Chante 2003:167). This gendered ideal construes "care" as the unpaid, natural, unskilled activity of women within the home, distinct from "work" as the paid, skilled, activity of men in the public sphere. Although such ideals do not reflect the everyday reality of most families (Segura 1994), they continue to shape understandings and practices regarding work and family. They also reinforce and perpetuate unequal economic conditions by justifying as fair the low wages for "women's work" (Stølen 1996:160).

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Such is the case in Guatemala. For example, until recently, the Guatemalan civil code further enforced outdated gender ideals. Article 110, which dealt with responsibilities within the institution of marriage, conferred upon the wife the "'special right and obligation' to care for dependent children and the home," and Article 113 provided "that a married woman may only exercise a profession or maintain employment where this does not prejudice her role as mother and homemaker" (Chant 2003:32). While the civil code reflects gender ideals of the upper-class elite, in which most women with children do not work (Smith 1995:736), it does not accurately reflect the lives of most women, particularly of the poor majority. However, many middle-class Ladinos accept much of the gendered ideology of the upper class, even when their lived experiences contradict the ideal (Smith 1995:736). Gender ideals regarding work also limit actual work conditions in Guatemala. Although the share of urban women who work for an income is on the rise, women tend to work in low-paying, traditionally "female" occupations such as clerical workers, vendors, domestic workers, teachers, and child care providers; while few women work as managers and employers (International Food Policy Research Institute 2003). One study found that, of these occupations, child care work—the activity most associated as women's work—received the lowest monthly wages (430 quetzales, about US$53). Wages for child care work were likely low because the work is associated with offering a flexible schedule for women with children (Hallman et al. 2002:17).

The limited employment opportunities for women in Guatemala, the lower wages for women who are employed, the regional wage discrepancies among women, and gendered ideologies regarding work help to explain women's involvement in the transnational adoption system. The majority of biological mothers were from rural areas (ILPEC 2000:20), so they generally would have had the fewest employment opportunities and would have received the

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lowest wages in the country. The inability to provide economically for their children was a major

factor in the women's decisions to relinquish their children. In contrast, nearly all the women

who fostered these children lived in urban areas (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:41). Although urban

women are generally better off economically than rural women, urban women still have

difficulty finding work. The foster care jobs that became available with the surge in transnational

adoptions provided much needed employment for many urban women. Foster care jobs also

allowed the women, most of whom were Ladinas of the middle- and lower-middle class, to care

for children in their homes, work that more closely aligned with dominant gender ideals.

Other related social and political factors may also explain the availability of Guatemalan

children for adoption. Guatemalan women have the highest fertility rate in Latin America, only

limited access to birth control and sex education, and no access to legal abortions. The country

also has the second highest infant mortality rate in the hemisphere, inadequate schooling, and

low life expectancy, all the result of neglectful or non-existent policies and services (Tierney

1997:2–3; Goudvis 2005). Despite the fact that the Guatemalan economy saw a significant

expansion between 1960 and 1980, Guatemala remained the country with the lowest

governmental investment in social services and education in Central America (Manz 2004:17),

and continues to rank low on indicators of gender equality (Miller and Hinman 2006). Guatemala

continues to provide few social services to alleviate poverty. Adoptions in some "sending"

countries have become a cost-effective way of dealing with social welfare problems (Kim

2005:57).

While the lack of social services and the acute dislocation from the decades of civil war

in Guatemala may have contributed to the number of children available for adoption, the increase

in transnational adoptions, in turn, may have reduced Guatemala's need or urgency to improve

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social services (McCreery Bunkers et al. 2009). For example, the state has dealt with children living on the streets of Guatemala City through police violence and incarceration in juvenile centers instead of creating programs to assist them (Tierney 1997:10). Also, although the Department of Social Welfare's *Bienestar Infantil y Familial* (Infant and Family Welfare) manages the government's orphanages and childcare centers, most orphanages in Guatemala are private because the state centers are inadequate (Tierney 1997:125–126). The state sends "abandoned" children to these private orphanages, but does not provide them with services, oversight, or funding and, as a result, many private orphanages struggle to provide sufficient resources to their charges (Goudvis 2005; Menocal 2007). Within a context of racialized and gendered economic discrimination paired with insufficient governmental social services, women's participation in the adoption process makes sense. Private-sector transnational adoption may have been perceived as the only viable option for some women, since it promised biological mothers that their children would receive loving, economically stable homes, and since it provided foster mothers with much needed and convenient work.

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A History of US-Guatemalan Transnational
Adoptions and its Abuses

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Transnational adoption to the United States is intimately linked to the histories of war, poverty, and restrictive government policies of other countries. The first major surge in transnational adoptions to the United States occurred in the aftermath of World War II, resulting in approximately 15,000 adoptions from abroad between 1953 and 1962 (Simon and Alstein 2000:6). This early interest in transnational adoption was largely a philanthropic response to children orphaned as a result of the war (Carp 1998:29; Simon and Alstein 2000:5). The vast majority of early transnational adopters felt a moral compulsion to help war orphans and were not involuntarily childless couples (Howell 2006:18). Since World War II, transnational adoption

from abroad to the United States has sprung up following wars in others countries, such as Korea

and Vietnam, and following the implementation of restrictive policies regarding population

control, such as in China (Dorow 2006:51; Dubinsky 2010:93). While people continued to adopt

from abroad for humanitarian reasons, they also chose to adopt for a variety of other reasons,

including infertility, a preference for adoption over pregnancy (often referred to as preferential

adoption), and the belief that they were ineligible for domestic adoption (Simon and Alstein

2000:89; Selman 2010). The number of children adopted from abroad to the United States per

year continued to rise, reaching a peak of 22,991 children in 2004 and dropping to 17,456 by

2008 (US Department of State 2009).

Adoptions from Guatemala to the United States reflect the general history and course of

US transnational adoption. Prospective parents initially began adopting children from Guatemala

in the 1980s as a "rescue" response to the civil war. The media depicted war orphans—or created

the illusion of orphans through close-up shots of children that excluded the presence of their

mothers—to produce an emotional response in the viewers (Briggs 2003). Although some

children lost both parents as a result of the war or other causes, the majority of children adopted

from Guatemala had at least one living biological parent. Even so, these children met the US's

official definition of "orphan" since their surviving parents or unwed mothers had "abandoned"

them or were deemed incapable of caring for them (Wilken 1995:91). Prospective parents felt

good about being able to help children they perceived to be in need of homes.

Figure 1 below shows the number of adoptions per year from Guatemalan to the United

States. US-Guatemalan adoptions rose dramatically from less than 500 from 1980 to 1990 to

4727 in 2007, and dropped slightly in 2008 to 4122, making Guatemala second only to China in

the number of officially recorded transnational adoptions to the United States (US Department of

State 2009). Yet, because Guatemala is so much smaller than China, in terms of country

population Guatemala was the largest source of US-adopted children in the world (Rotabi and

Bunkers 2008). Transnational adoptions in Guatemala officially closed at the end of 2007, a

point to which I will return.[7] The reasons attributed to the increasing popularity in transnational

adoptions from Guatemala include Guatemala's proximity to the United States, continuing

humanitarian concerns, the availability of younger children due to less strict national regulations

governing adoption, and widespread placement of children in foster care instead of orphanages

(Gibbons et al. 2009:61).
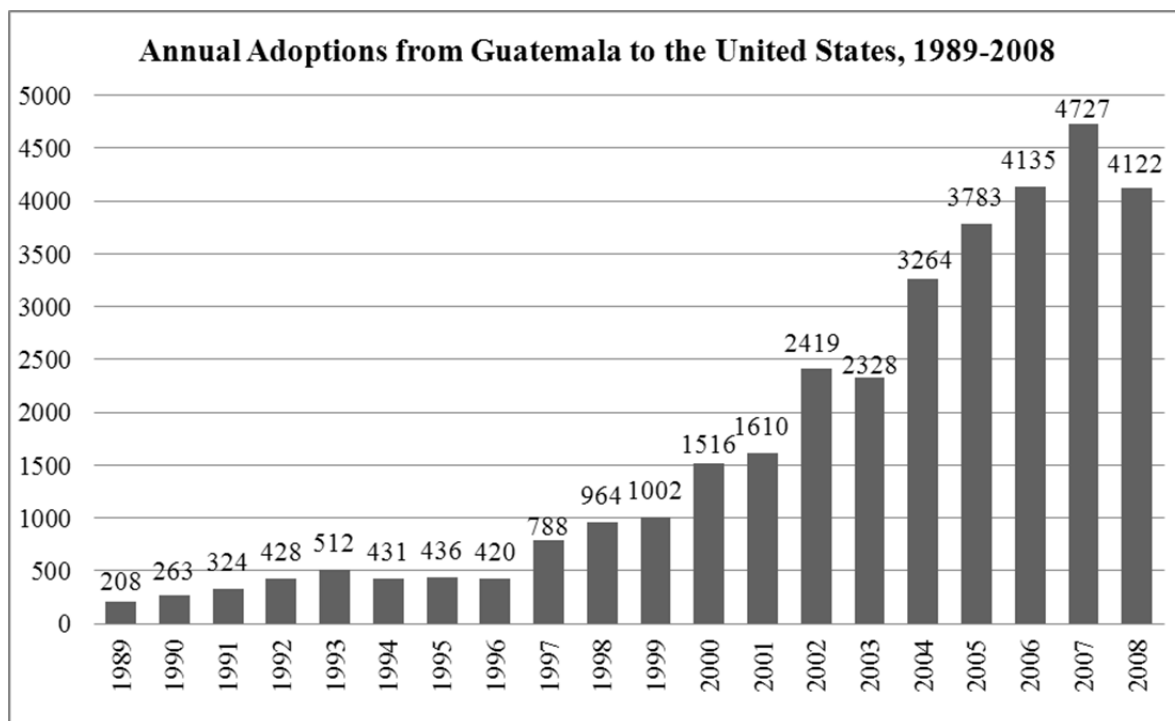
Sources: Simon and Altstein 2000:15; US Department of State 2009

Figure 1. Annual Adoptions from Guatemala to the United States

Another possible reason for the perceived need for transnational adoptions in Guatemala

was the scarcity of domestic adoptions: less than three percent of Guatemalan adoptions were

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[7] Although Guatemalan transnational adoptions officially ended at the end of 2007, cases filed prior to the December 31st cut-off date (so-called "transition cases") continued to be processed under the former adoption system, explaining the existence of US-Guatemalan adoptions in 2008.

domestic (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:25). Some of the reasons for such low numbers of national

adoptions may include the complexity of adoption procedures and the number of requirements

for prospective adoptive parents, the prohibitive costs and the belief that lawyers preferred US

dollars, and the belief that Guatemalan orphanages and social workers preferred transnational

adoptions and imposed obstacles to domestic adoptions (ILPEC 2000:7). These reasons suggest

that the expansion of transnational adoption in Guatemala may have decreased the possibilities

for domestic adoption. Another reason cited for the low number of domestic adoptions is a

virtually non-existent culture of adoption in Guatemala (ILPEC 2000:7). This last reason is open

to debate because domestic adoptions did occur during the peak period of transnational

adoptions—842 children were adopted domestically from 1997 to 2007 (Casa Alianza et al.

2007:25). Figure 2 below shows a breakdown of Guatemalan domestic adoptions by year.
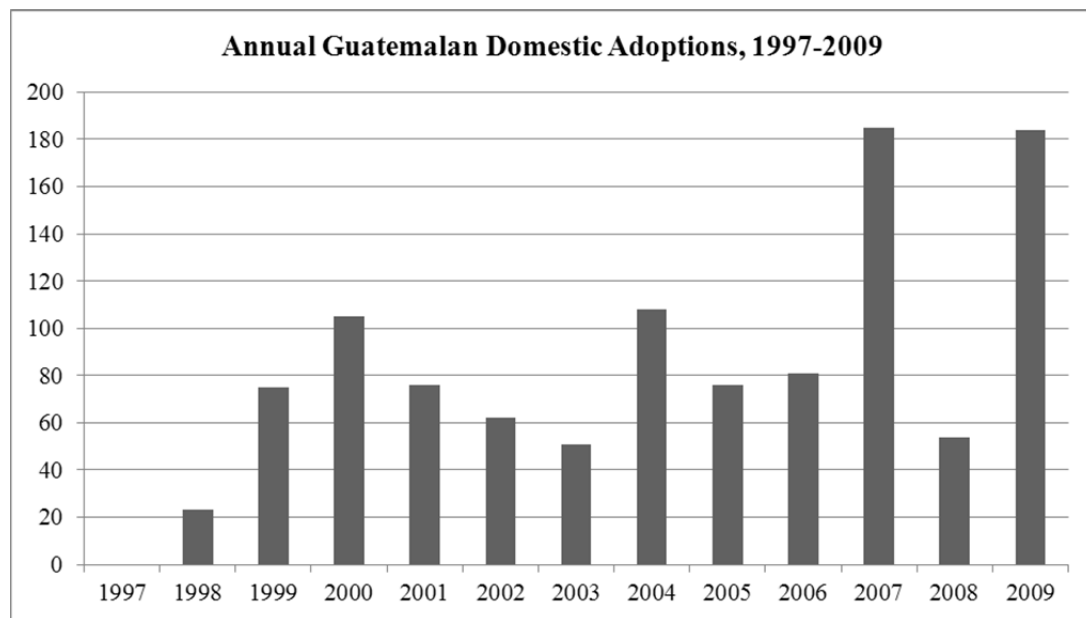
Sources: Casa Alianza et al. 2007; Consejo Nacional de Adopciones 2009

Figure 2. Annual Guatemalan Domestic Adoptions

Transnational adoptions from Guatemala to the United States led to contradictory outcomes. While the United States provided homes for over 30,000 Guatemalan children, these adoptions were a product of a civil war and widespread poverty for which US policy was responsible, to some extent. The United States has had a contentious relationship with Guatemala that includes political strife, war, and the implementation of neoliberalist economic policies. Over the years, the US government has funded military overthrows of democratically-elected officials in Guatemala to support US economic interests, given millions of dollars to its military regimes and, in the 1960s, financed and helped train Guatemalan central intelligence agencies in counterinsurgency methods (Skidmore and Smith 1997; Grandin 2004:74; Manz 2004:21). US foreign policy toward Central America as well as the politics of the Cold War allowed elite Guatemalans and members of the military to justify their increasingly authoritarian rule under the guise of anticommunism during the Guatemalan Civil War, and the United States government largely ignored the brutality that ensued (Manz 2004:21).

US-Guatemalan transnational adoptions also occurred amid increasing accusations of illicit activities connected to adoptions, suggesting and, in some cases, proving that not all children adopted to the US were without biological parents. Transnational adoptions in Guatemala have been linked to kidnapping, organ trafficking, and the "production" of children for sale (Adams 1998; Benítez 2007a). In 1995, the *Centro de Estudios de Guatemala* (Center for Guatemalan Studies) published a report about the trafficking of children in Guatemala. Although the report appears to be based on news articles rather than the Center's own investigation, it provides a useful outline of the types of problems surrounding adoption and documents when these issues arose in the news: The selling of children orphaned as a result of state repression was denounced as early as 1982, and reported accounts of the practice of

stealing, buying, and exporting young children increased in the mid-1980s (Centro de Estudios de Guatemala 1995:7). In 1987 Guatemalan authorities uncovered several clandestine *casas cuna* (cradle houses) in Guatemala City that were holding children for adoption to the United States and, in 1994, Guatemala's *Procurador de Menores* (Department of Children Services) confirmed the existence of 50 clandestine cradle houses in the country (Centro de Estudios de Guatemala 1995:9–10). In 1988 the European Parliament condemned child trafficking in Guatemala (Centro de Estudios de Guatemala 1995:7), and by 1991 the *Secretaría de Bienestar Social* (Secretary of Social Welfare) revealed that the number of transnational adoptions was alarmingly high, that members of the military were involved in kidnapping, and that civil servants were accepting bribes and falsifying documents in order to profit from adoptive parents' interests (Centro de Estudios de Guatemala 1995:19). Given the clandestine nature of the unsavory aspects of illegal activities, the degree to which profiteering and corruption entered into the process of adoption is not yet known, but there is widespread acknowledgement that it did occur. A 2010 report by the *Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala* (International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala) found that 50 transition cases—adoption files that had been submitted, but not completed, under the former adoption system—contained irregularities constituting a crime (Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala 2010).

Illicit activities surrounding the adoption system, then, were made public well before the surge in US-Guatemala adoptions. Yet, Guatemala and the United States did little to regulate adoptions for over 25 years. Although the US Embassy began requiring DNA tests of biological mothers and children in 1998 and added a second DNA test in 2007 (Hom 2007), this may have done little to stop illicit activities, as recent accounts have uncovered doctors who falsified documents (Llorca 2008b). In 2008, a woman, whose child had been stolen from her at gunpoint

in March 2007, challenged the DNA test done as part of the adoption process and convinced

authorities to test her and the child; the new test proved that she was the girl's biological mother.

There was no evidence that the prospective adoptive parents knew the baby was stolen and, until

the new DNA test was drawn, the adoption file showed no evidence of fraud (Llorca 2008a).

Given the contentious history between the US and Guatemala and the proliferation of

news reports on illicit activities surrounding adoptions, it is not surprising that many

Guatemalans felt ambivalent toward transnational adoption. As noted, journalists and other

critics in Guatemala often represented transnational adoption as linked to organ and child

trafficking, baby selling, and other unethical practices; to varying degrees, Guatemalans believed

these accounts. In a study involving interviews with twenty-three Guatemalans in Antigua,

psychologists Samantha Wilson and Judith Gibbons found continued fear of unethical practice

regarding transnational adoption (2005:742). Thirty percent of those they interviewed mentioned

the "business" quality of adoption; although 61 percent believed that adopted children were

treated well, 48 percent expressed concern over the child's loss of language and culture, 9

percent mentioned that the child might be sold for organs, and one third referred to the

trafficking or stealing of children, demonstrating "a mixture of benevolence and mistrust"

(Wilson and Gibbons 2005:747).

In her documentary *Goodbye Baby* (2005), which explores issues of global inequality

surrounding transnational adoption in Guatemala, Patricia Goudvis provides a graphic

representation of Guatemalans' mixed feelings toward transnational adoption. The documentary

begins with a parade celebrating International Children's Day in Guatemala. Along the parade

route is a corresponding anti-adoption protest with people carrying posters depicting a dollar bill

with a child's face on it and the words "*Los Niños y Niñas no tienen precio*" ("Boys and Girls

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have no price"). Transnational adoption was simultaneously celebrated and feared, lauded and criticized. When, in the course of my first research trip to Guatemala, I asked a man working in a photo shop near the US Embassy what he thought about adoption, he answered, "I don't think that adoption is good because we don't know what they use them for." If the children are cared for and given an education, he thought that was good, but "you just don't know."

In response to growing domestic and international unrest over increasing reports of illegal and unethical adoption practices, US-Guatemalan adoptions officially ended December 31, 2007, at which time both countries finally began to enforce the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. The Hague Convention, an international law that reinforces the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, was established in 1993 to protect the rights of children and their families in regards to transnational adoption. The Convention sets minimum standards "to ensure that intercountry adoptions are made in the best interests of the child and with respect for his or her fundamental rights, and to prevent the abduction, the sale of, or traffic in children" (Hague Conference on Private International Law 1993). The law urges countries first to do what they can to keep children with their biological families, then to encourage domestic adoption, and to allow transnational adoption only after all in-country options have been exhausted. Although the United States signed the Convention in 1994 and Guatemala ratified it in 2002, neither country enforced the law until early 2008.[8] At that time, both countries finally established "central authorities"—the

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[8] The reason for the delayed implementation of the Hague Convention in both counties is a matter of some debate. In Guatemala, the Constitutional Court declared the ratification of the Convention unconstitutional. However, the delay in Guatemala has also been attributed to greed and extensive governmental corruption. For example, the group of lawyers who initiated the court case was interested in maintaining the existing notarial system of adoption from which they greatly profited, and the majority of governmental institutions were linked to corruption and irregularities in the adoption process (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:11–16; Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala 2010:18). In the United States, the Department of State attributed the 14-year delay in implementation to the difficulty of developing a common standard among all 50 states (each had its own adoption law), which included the lengthy process of reviewing public comments to the proposed regulations (Keyes 2007).

Consejo Nacional de Adopciones (CNA, National Adoption Council) in Guatemala and the

Office of Children's Issues, a division of the Department of State, in the US—to implement and

oversee new adoption policies in alignment with the Convention's requirements. The closure in

US-Guatemalan adoptions also effectively marked the end of employment for the foster mothers

caring for children awaiting adoption.

The Guatemalan Transnational Adoption System

Given the degree of poverty in Guatemala, the amount of money generated from

transnational adoptions is striking. The adoption industry in Guatemala was reported to have

generated revenue estimated from US$150 million (Herman 2007) to as high as US$200 million

per year (López et al. 2006), and, according to UNICEF, transnational adoption became the third

or fourth source of international exchange for Guatemala. In addition to the money directly

related to the processing of adoptions, "baby tourism" increased as businesses hoped to profit

from the increase in demand for Guatemalan children. Many hotels, such as the Marriott in

Guatemala City, catered to prospective adoptive parents by creating designated "adoption floors"

and stocking gift shops with diapers, wet wipes, formula, and baby clothes. By 2007, this market

was an overt and visible presence in Guatemala City and Antigua, the two cities most frequented

by adoptive parents. As I sat in popular hotel lobbies, prospective adoptive parents bustled by,

pushing strollers or sitting on sofas talking with lawyers, facilitators, or foster families.

The web of people involved in the adoption process was complex and included adoption

agencies, prospective adoptive parents, social workers, and local and federal officials in the

United States, as well as lawyers, adoption facilitators, *jaladores* (intermediaries), pediatricians,

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However, issues of money also arose in the United States, as public comments included opposition from adoption
agencies concerned with the extra administrative costs compliance would entail and, as a result, the increased cost of
adoption for prospective parents (Kimball 2005:573–577).

translators, biological parents, foster families, and government officials in Guatemala. Certainly, many of these stakeholders had good intentions. However, the lack of sufficient government oversight, paired with the economic opportunities adoption provided and the existing criminal network, made transnational adoption a prime target for illicit activities. A detailed account of all the people involved in the adoption process is beyond the scope of the current project. Instead, I limit the discussion to those people most central to the foster mothers' experiences. In this section, I describe the lawyers and jaladores and, in following sections, I discuss the biological parents and their children, the adoptive parents, and the foster mothers.

The majority of transnational adoptions in Guatemala were processed by private lawyers instead of by judges and the court system. Two kinds of adoption existed in Guatemala, juridical and notarial. In juridical adoptions (only two percent of the total), judges and the court system were directly involved in processing and approving the adoption. A juridical adoption began with the presentation of the prospective adoptive parents before a judge, who, having confirmed the biological parents' consent, appointed a social worker to perform a socioeconomic study of the prospective parents. Once complete, the file was then reviewed and processed by the *Procuraduría General de la Nación* (PGN, Guatemala's Attorney General's Office) (ILPEC 2000:5). Juridical adoptions were unpopular because they required the prospective adoptive parents to be in Guatemala in order to begin the process. In contrast, the remaining 98 percent of adoptions were notarial (extrajudicial) adoptions, which were processed by lawyers or notaries and did not require resolution from a competent judge (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:13). Notarial adoptions effectively bypassed the judicial system, thus enhancing the role of the lawyer. The participation of the family court was limited to transferring the adoption files to social workers employed by PGN, so they could review the socioeconomic investigation of the family

performed by social workers in the United States (ILPEC 2000:6, 34). Approximately 175 to 200 Guatemalan lawyers processed transnational adoptions (ILPEC 2000:22). Notarial adoptions were popular because the prospective adoptive parents did not need to travel to Guatemala in order to start the process. Instead, a Guatemalan lawyer could do so on their behalf.

These private adoption lawyers often served multiple roles. In addition to handling the legal procedures of the adoption, some lawyers also served as the in-country facilitator, receiving the child from the biological mother, communicating with the prospective adoptive parents, and hiring, paying, and managing foster mothers. At least a few lawyers, such as Feliciano Carillo Gudiel and Susana Luarca, themselves ran private orphanages in addition to performing as attorneys in facilitating adoptions (San Martin 2007; Smith-Sparks 2007). The lawyers frequently handled the exchange of money and charged adoption fees, but were not generally transparent regarding the allocation of such fees. Given the relatively unregulated nature of notarial adoptions, most available information regarding adoption lawyers' fees is self-reported, so their actual earnings and the extent to which they may have profited from adoption remains unclear. For example, one study (ILPEC 2000:23) found significant differences among the prices lawyers quoted for their services, ranging between US$650 and US$6000 per adoption. The lawyer charging US$650 said she was only responsible for the legal procedures, not for the arrangement or provision of child care. The lawyer who charged a total adoption fee of US$6000 was responsible for both the legal procedures and the provision of child care and reported that the fee was used to cover expenses such as foster care, milk, diapers, and medical fees. Other lawyers included the expense of DNA tests, translation, and document preparation in their fees, but none mentioned payments or expenses associated with finding available children, despite the prevalence of the use of intermediaries in the Guatemalan adoption process.

Jaladores—which has been translated as "tuggers" (Aizenman and Roig-Franzia 2007:B2), "touts" (Aizenman 2009), "baby brokers" (Lacey 2006), "intermediaries" (Centro de Estudios de Guatemala 1995), and even "shadowy figures whose task it is to find pregnant women and pay or coerce them to relinquish their child soon after birth" (Smith-Sparks 2007:2)—served as liaisons between lawyers and biological mothers by seeking out pregnant, impoverished women and offering to pay medical expenses as well as provide some direct money, in exchange for relinquishing their children for adoption. According to stories in Guatemalan and US newspapers, biological mothers reportedly received between US$650 and $2000 per child (Lacey 2006:6; López et al. 2006; Benítez 2007b; San Martin 2007). Some jaladores also offered women room and board during their pregnancies. These houses became commonly known as *casas de engorde* (fattening houses) (Benítez 2007b), which hints at the contentious views Guatemalans held regarding the matter of remuneration in adoption (Goudvis 2005). Although some people believed the biological families should receive assistance, others cautioned that such assistance was too often coercive and served to keep biological mothers from being able to change their minds, since they would have to return any money they had received, often already spent. In addition to economic and physical coercion, it appears that jaladores and lawyers may have also used emotional appeals to coerce biological mothers into relinquishing their children. Advertisements in local papers "providing telephone numbers can be seen urging women to 'choose life' for their children, 'listen to their hearts,' and give up their babies in adoption" (Benítez 2007a). As one US journalist put it, adoption was presented to biological mothers as "the perfect answer, one that [would] leave the child with a wealthy family" (Lacey 2006:6).

<u>Adoptive Parents from the United States</u>

Although demographic information about adoptive parents has not been compiled for all US-Guatemalan adoptions processed, two separate studies of random samples of PGN adoption files—one of 90 adoption files (ILPEC 2000) and the other of 1,083 files (Casa Alianza et al. 2007)—provide a preliminary profile of adoptive parents. The study conducted by the *Instituto Latinoamericano para la Educación y la Comunicación* (ILPEC, Latin American Institute for Education and Communications) found that 82 percent of adoptive parents were legally married couples, 17 percent were single mothers, and one percent was single fathers. The age of adoptive parents ranged from 27 to 50 years, with an average age of 40 (ILPEC 2000:33). The report states that the US Embassy claimed that more than 85 percent of adoptive parents were professionals with master's or doctorate degrees (ILPEC 2000:47). The 2007 study by a group of governmental and non-governmental organizations found that adoptive parents lived in all 50 US states, the top nine being Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, Florida, Illinois, Virginia, Massachusetts, California, and North Carolina, representing 44 percent of the cases (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:33–34).

Prospective parents in the United States decide to adopt internationally for a number of reasons, including infertility, the perceived length of processing time and difficulty of domestic adoptions, and humanitarian concerns. As noted, prospective parents initially began adopting children from Guatemala in the 1980s as an emotional response to media images of war orphans (Briggs 2003) and felt good about being able to help children they perceived to be in need of homes. Many prospective parents also preferred to adopt from Guatemala over other countries because of cost and convenience. Guatemala's proximity to the US reduced the costs of adoption and, for those prospective adoptive parents who were able and willing, allowed for more frequent visits with their prospective children. Yet, adopting from Guatemala was not inexpensive.

Adoptive parents paid an estimated US$10,000 to US$40,000 per adoption, plus travel expenses (Centro de Estudios de Guatemala 1995:16; Lacey 2006; Casa Alianza et al. 2007:22). Although some prospective parents were able to cover the cost of adoption with savings or by taking out loans, others raised money by selling cookbooks, fundraising through community churches or sports teams, or asking for donations via online charity sites, to name a few strategies (Jesdanun 2007:P63; Mason 2007). The US "Hope for Children Act," enacted in 2001, also helped defray some of the costs by providing a tax credit of up to US$10,000 for qualified adoption expenses, whether domestic or international (US Congress 2001).

Another factor contributing to prospective adoptive parents' decision to adopt from Guatemala was the country's relatively lax adoption laws that decreased processing times. As a result, prospective parents adopting from Guatemala experienced a relatively shorter waiting period—an average of nine months—than prospective parents adopting from other countries with waiting periods of up to three years (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:30, 34). A short wait time was optimal as most parents preferred to adopt babies and young children (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:29). The relatively short processing time also reduced the chance that biological mothers would change their minds before the completion of the adoption (San Martin 2007). For those prospective adoptive parents who were unable or unwilling to travel frequently to another country, Guatemala's policies only required a three-day stay in country at the end of the adoption process. Guatemala's adoption policies also allowed single people and older couples to adopt (Mason 2007). Although Guatemala's adoption policies prohibited gays and lesbians from adopting, some were able to do so as "single" individuals.

The closure of transnational adoption in Guatemala at the end of 2007, as one US news source put it, "stirred an emotional backlash from thousands of prospective parents in the United

States" with adoption cases still pending (Aizenman and Roig-Franzia 2007:B1). Many

prospective parents lobbied to have their cases processed under the old regulations. Although one

reporter described this lobbying as an attempt "to bypass a new system designed to prevent

identity fraud and the sale or even theft of children" (Llorca 2008b), it was more likely an

emotional response to fight for children they already considered sons and daughters. Despite the

availability of information about the country's questionable adoption practices throughout the

years, prospective parents, as another journalist explained, "[were] often so emotionally involved

in the process that they [did] not adequately investigate the inner workings of this country's

system" (Lacey 2006:6). Many prospective adoptive parents had already established a

relationship with the children they intended to adopt and were concerned that delays in

processing their cases would negatively affect the children.

<u>Guatemalan Children and Their Biological Parents</u>

Based on the two studies of PGN adoption files mentioned previously, Guatemalan

children adopted internationally ranged in age from 0 to 17 at the end of the adoption process,

but almost half of them (48 percent) were six months or younger, more than a third (38 percent)

of them were seven to twelve months, and another five percent were between one and two years.

In other words, 86 percent of the children were under the age of one and 91 percent of the

children were under the age of two (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:29). Also, 57 percent of the

children were girls and 43 percent were boys (ILPEC 2000:19). The majority of the children

were born in Guatemala City and the surrounding areas (63.5 percent) and the rest of the children

(36.5 percent) were born in the interior of the country (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:31). Information

about the children's ethnic background was not included in adoption files, and this information

could not be gleaned from place of birth since at least some biological mothers were transported

to Guatemala City by adoption lawyers or facilitators to give birth (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:32). In fact, in determining the place of origin of the biological mothers based on copies of their identity cards in the files, the ILPEC study found that 65 percent of the women were from the interior of the country and only 35 percent from Guatemala City and surrounding areas (ILPEC 2000:20). These numbers suggest that over a quarter of biological mothers from the interior gave birth in Guatemala City.

The ages of the biological mothers ranged from 14 to 48 years: 14.2 percent were 20 years or younger, 59.5 percent were 21 to 30 years of age, and 26 percent were over age 30. Reported employment included domestic workers, factory assembly workers, market vendors, prostitutes, and fulltime caretakers of their other children. The reasons women reported for why they decided to relinquish their children included unplanned pregnancies, pregnancies out of wedlock, rape, and poverty. Some women did not want their families and communities to find out about their pregnancies out of fear of physical or social reprisal; others had left their children under the care of relatives in their villages to seek work in the capital and did not feel they could burden their families with another child; some said the children's fathers left them when they learned of the pregnancy; and others indicated that their workplace did not accept children. Over 90 percent of the women cited their precarious economic situation as the reason for relinquishing their children. Although some Guatemalans believed that biological mothers relinquished their children for monetary compensation, the mothers themselves stated that they wanted their children to benefit from the opportunity to have what they themselves were unable to provide (ILPEC 2000:20–21).

Interestingly, the social workers interviewed by ILPEC felt that the majority of biological mothers were firm in their decision to relinquish their children for adoption and showed "little

affection" toward them; the social workers felt that only two percent of them "manifested pain or sorrow, arguing that their minds had been made up and that this was the only way to offer the child an opportunity for a better life" (ILPEC 2000:21). Yet, when ILPEC representatives interviewed two biological mothers for their study, they perceived that "these mothers live with a painful memory of their children and that it has turned out to be a traumatic process for them. They are consoled only with the knowledge that their children are now abroad, that their new parents will love and care for them" (ILPEC 2000:21). According to Karen Dubinsky, the biological mothers' role seemed to occupy a "narrow space between victim and villain" (2010:119). The Guatemalan press reported incidences of babies being stolen from their mothers, but also reported that women were receiving compensation for relinquishing their children and that some women, known as "kangaroo mothers," even made a business of becoming pregnant with the intent of selling the children for adoption (Benítez 2007b). While many biological mothers most likely had the children's best interests in mind and found it difficult and emotionally painful to relinquish their children, they were often viewed as unaffected or emotionless.

Private-sector Foster Mothers in Guatemala

As noted, one of the main reasons adopting from Guatemala appealed to prospective parents was the widespread use of foster mothers to provide individual care for children during the adoption process rather than identifying adoptable children in "institutional care," namely, state or private orphanages. Agencies utilized foster care as a "selling point" to prospective adoptive parents in the United States who were concerned with the health and overall well-being of the children. Foster homes were preferred over orphanages because "institutional" care has been linked to children's stunted physical growth, cognitive and developmental delays, and

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socioemotional problems (Gunnar et al. 2000). One study assessed the health and development of children adopted from Guatemala living in the United States, and found that children "who had resided in foster care had better growth and cognitive scores than children who had resided in orphanages before adoption" (Miller et al. 2005:710).

Although Guatemala formally began implementation of a national foster care program in June 2006, only five children had been placed with foster families by the end of the first year (Cáceres Gamarro 2010), and in August 2008, only 22 children were living with foster families approved by the program (Sandoval 2008). For the overwhelming majority of cases, foster care in Guatemala was not part of the state's child welfare system as it is in the United States. Instead, private adoption lawyers and facilitators hired care workers—mostly women—to foster children, most of whom were delivered directly by their biological mothers to the adoption lawyers (ILPEC 2000:25). This private-sector foster care was unique to the Guatemalan transnational adoption system. Although foster families were authorized by PGN, which limited them to fostering no more than two children at a time (ILPEC 2000:17, 24), private foster homes were not certified or regulated by the state. Supervision of foster homes was left to the lawyers who placed the children (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:37). Ninety-eight percent of children awaiting adoption lived in these private homes under foster care (ILPEC 2000:17). While foster care was generally found to be beneficial for the children placed in these private homes (ILPEC 2000:24), an unfortunate consequence of adoptive families' preferences for foster care and for adopting younger children was that children in institutional care settings and children older than two years of age generally did not have access to new families through adoption.

Although some prospective adoptive parents moved to Guatemala and fostered the children they hoped to adopt (e.g., O'Dwyer 2010), most foster homes were Guatemalan families

in which the mothers of these families offered their services as care workers (Casa Alianza et al.

2007:39). Fostering children was their job. According to the two studies of PGN adoption files,

"custodians" were between 45 and 60 years of age, were middle to low middle class, lived with

their families, and had biological children (ILPEC 2000:24). Eighty-seven percent of temporary

homes were located in the department of Guatemala (56 percent within Guatemala City)—the

location of PGN, the US Embassy, the international airport, many pediatricians and lawyers,

DNA laboratories, and many hotels—and 7.6 percent were located in the department of

Sacatepéquez, mostly in the city of Antigua, a tourist location only 40 minutes from Guatemala

City (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:41). In other words, almost 95 percent of foster homes were

conveniently concentrated within a short distance from the hub of the adoption process,

Guatemala City. Within this concentrated area were even more densely concentrated areas, what

one of the studies called "*colonias cuna*" (cradle communities) and "*sectores cuna*" (cradle

sectors). Cradle communities were neighborhoods (*colonias*) with large concentrations of foster

homes, and cradle sectors were the concentration of adjacent cradle communities. Although the

families in these areas lived in generally solidly constructed houses with utilities, the foster

mothers generally had low levels of education, had difficulty finding jobs with decent wages, and

were often unemployed prior to fostering (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:43).

Foster mothers reported earning monthly incomes of 500 to 3000 quetzales

(approximately US$62 to US$375),[9] plus expenses. However, the woman who reported receiving

3,000 quetzales was responsible for covering all related expenses, such as milk and food,

medical care, and clothing (ILPEC 2000:24). As noted, average monthly urban wages for women

were 1650 quetzales (US$215), so some foster mothers earned considerably less than the

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[9] For information obtained from my interviews with foster mothers, I used a conversion rate of eight quetzales to one US dollar.

average, while others earned considerably more than the average. Although foster mothers

received payment—most or all of which went toward the care of the children, others noted that

they also cared deeply for the children and expressed the emotional difficulty of handing over the

children to their adoptive parents (Goudvis 2005). The work they were engaged in was

mothering, and the children became part of their households. The women generally received the

children as newborns and the children stayed with them for an average of eight months (ILPEC

2000:24). According to ILPEC, "as far as could be determined, the majority [did] a good job in

caring for the children and [felt] proud to be part of the children's upbringing" (ILPEC 2000:24).

At the same time that foster mothers played a significant part in making Guatemalan

babies and children attractive for adoptive parents, who valued the care the foster mothers

provided, their care work was devalued by many people in Guatemala. Many Guatemalans were

critical of foster mothers, who they viewed as "criminals" participating in the selling of the

country's babies (Goudvis 2005). As one of the studies cautioned, although foster care providers

"likely maintain[ed] good conditions for the children since the pay they receive[d] and the

sustaining of the business depend[ed] on this," this motivation did "not guarantee that the minors

[would] be spared from hostile environments, where they could suffer from mistreatment, abuse,

or neglect" (Casa Alianza et al. 2007:43–44). Lack of state regulations led some people to

believe the intent of attorneys and other adoption facilitators in using paid foster mothers was to

obscure the illicit nature of obtaining children for adoption (Benítez 2007b). Such accusations

were made more plausible by media reports of the discovery of unregistered cradle houses

"accompanied by photos of middle-aged foster mothers, eyes downcast" (Dubinsky 2010:112).

As members of Guatemalan society, foster mothers would have been aware of such accounts.

The two studies of PGN adoption files by non-governmental and governmental agencies (ILPEC 2000; Casa Alianza et al. 2007) serve as a base for the current study. They provide useful demographic and socioeconomic data on Guatemalan foster mothers. However, neither study examined the experiences of foster mothers in any depth. The information in the study by Casa Alianza and five other governmental and nongovernmental organizations is based solely on data found in the PGN adoption files. While the ILPEC study involved 16 visits to foster homes in addition to its review of the PGN adoption files, the study's written report includes only two paragraphs of little content regarding the foster home visits.

Despite the increase in scholarly literature on transnational adoptions, little attention has been given to the experiences of the women who fostered children in their homes during the adoption process. An exception to this is a study conducted by Judith L. Gibbons, Samantha L. Wilson, and Alicia M. Schnell (2009), in which they interviewed 16 Guatemalan foster parents.[10] The stated purpose of their study "was to explore the views of" and "to provide a voice to" foster parents (Gibbons et al. 2009:60). By calling attention to the foster parents' views toward the transnational adoption process and their reflections on what they understood the biological mothers' and adoptive parents' experiences to be, the authors provide an important, preliminary look into foster parents' perceptions about the adoption process. However, the study focuses more on the foster parents' outward perceptions of others—on Guatemalan's views toward adoption as seen through the eyes of foster parents—than on the foster parents' own personal experiences fostering.

My research complements and furthers the previous studies by focusing on the women's experiences of their own temporary care work and relationships with the children under their

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[10] Of the 16 foster parents interviewed, 15 were women and only one was a man (Gibbons et al. 2009:64); thus the study is mostly about the perception of foster mothers.

care, their employers, and the biological and adoptive parents. In addition to addressing the foster mothers' perceptions of others, my research is concerned with what the women thought and felt about fostering children in their homes within the political economic context of transnational adoption. The conflicting depiction of foster mothers—portrayed as paid criminals by the Guatemalan media and as loving mothers by adoption agencies—is illustrative of the ambiguous nature of the foster care work they provided. Foster care work was at once a caring, kin-like relationship and a paying job, which depended on the "production" of "satisfactory" babies for an international commercial enterprise. My study examines how foster mothers experienced and made sense of their seemingly liminal paid care work within the context of transnational adoption.

<u>Data Collection and Foster Mothers</u>
<u>of the Current Study</u>

The last two sections of this chapter discuss the details, purposes, and limitations of the research methods used in the current study. In this section, I describe the methods I used to collect data, including participant-observation, sampling, and semi-structured interviews. I end the section with a demographic sketch of the foster mothers interviewed. The final section of the chapter discusses the two methods I used to analyze the data: content analysis and the analysis of emotive language.

My current focus on foster care work grew out of preliminary field work in Guatemala in July 2007 at the peak of US-Guatemalan transnational adoption. During that trip, I visited Guatemala City and Antigua, the two main hubs of adoption services in Guatemala. I observed adoption "hot spots" like the airport, hotel lobbies, the US Embassy, and Antigua's Central Park. I saw how clearly visible both the creation of families and the market supporting it were at these sites. At the airport, I heard several prospective adoptive parents discussing their imminent visits

with their children; I watched as others departed, children in hand. At the hotels, some prospective parents met with adoption lawyers; others waited for, and then greeted, foster mothers as they arrived with the children; and still others wheeled their soon-to-be sons and daughters around the lobbies. At the US Embassy, the waiting room was filled to capacity with clusters of parents, children, and lawyers. I also held informal and semi-formal interviews with US citizens and Guatemalans, including adoptive mothers, hotel employees, shopkeepers, a travel agent, a woman who conducted post-adoption searches for biological mothers, private orphanages' employees, a former adoption facilitator, and a foster mother. I met with the foster mother in her home and was able to see her interact with the two children under her care. Biological mothers are notably absent from the list of people with whom I spoke. Although I was certainly interested in hearing about their experiences, through conversations and interactions with others, I learned of the difficulty and potential danger of interviewing biological mothers, both for them and for me.

My conversation with the foster mother during that first trip, as well as my observation of other foster mothers arriving in hotel lobbies with babies and leaving empty handed, stuck with me. Upon returning to the United States, I was struck by the lack of research on foster care workers within the context of transnational adoption and, ultimately, this became the focus of my research. By the time I returned to Guatemala in summer 2009 to interview foster care workers, Guatemalan transnational adoptions had officially been closed for more than a year. During this second trip, I again split my time between Guatemala City and Antigua. I observed many of the spots I had visited in 2007, noting that the visible signs of adoption had markedly vanished. I also visited CNA (the newly established central authority) and spoke with their public relations specialist.

The primary reason for this second trip, however, was to locate and interview private-sector foster mothers to learn about their experiences caring for children during the transnational adoption process. Although the closure of adoptions kept me from being able to observe the women's interactions with the children they fostered in most cases, and thus was a limitation of my research, I believe the closure ultimately allowed me more easily to identify and interview safely foster care workers. The closure also meant that the women had had some time to reflect on their experiences and that they did not have to fear losing their jobs if they spoke with me.

Yet, foster mothers remained a difficult population to locate. Although PGN adoption files often contained the names of the foster mothers pertaining to each case, I did not have access to these files. Also, since foster mothers did not register with the state, no registry or database of foster care providers existed. Therefore, I used the only method that would enable me to locate Guatemalan women who had fostered or were fostering children awaiting adoption to the United States, namely, network sampling (Bernard 2006:192). I limited my sample of paid foster care workers to women, since very few men appear to have served in this role (ILPEC 2000:25). Although the entire foster family often developed a relationship with the child and assisted in the child's care, I focus solely on the women who were directly paid for this work to explore issues of paid care work within the context of transnational adoption. To begin the search, I contacted some of the people I had met in 2007. I also stayed at hotels previously known to cater to prospective adoptive parents, and hotel employees became an invaluable source of information.

Given the difficulty of locating foster mothers, it was not possible to collect a list of potential interviewees from which to select a random sample. Instead, I contacted and interviewed women as I went along, which facilitated the identification of other foster mothers,

both by direct referral and indirectly through information that further guided my search. I identified and interviewed ten women. The limitations of my sample include its non-random selection and its small size and, as such, the findings of the study may not be representative of the population as a whole. I almost surely have a biased sample, as those women who agreed to talk with me were probably those who considered themselves to be good foster mothers, rather than those who were exceptionally mercenary about fostering. Despite these limitations, the demographic data of the women I interviewed is similar to the information collected by the two studies of PGN adoption files by non-governmental and governmental agencies (ILPEC 2000; Casa Alianza et al. 2007). I also felt I reached saturation in interview responses regarding the women's experiences fostering children in the sense that I heard many of the same themes throughout the interviews and little new information after the eighth interview.

I held semi-structured interviews with ten foster mothers. The purpose of the interviews was to learn what the women thought and felt about fostering children in their homes, how they understood and made sense of the affective and economic aspects of their care work, and how they talked about their own relationships with the children, the adoptive parents, the biological parents, and their employers. Based on my preliminary fieldwork and a literature review, I developed a list of questions to use as a guide during each interview (Appendix A), leaving ample space for foster mothers to talk about what they felt was most important to them regarding their foster care work. Before the interviews, I handed each participant a written consent form in Spanish, read it aloud, and then asked the participant if she had any questions before proceeding with the interview. These interviews were conducted in Spanish and ranged from 30 minutes to two hours in length. They took place in locations convenient for the women; some interviews

occurred in the women's homes while others were conducted at the hotel where I was staying or at a restaurant.

All ten women I interviewed lived either in Guatemala City or Antigua, were Ladina, and ranged in age from their early 30s to late 50s. Six of the women identified themselves as married, but when I asked them to list the members of their households, three of the women did not include their husbands and did not provide an explanation. One woman was married with her husband living in the United States, one was divorced, one was widowed, and one had never been married. All ten women were mothers to biological children. Two of the women I interviewed were friends from different neighborhoods of the same city, and one had recommended the other to her employer. Three of the women were friends and neighbors in the same colonia (residential district of the city) and had worked for some of the same lawyers and facilitators. These three foster mothers also made reference to several other women in the neighborhood who had fostered as well, suggesting that their colonia was a cradle community. Due to the closure of transnational adoptions, only one woman was still fostering a child at the time of the interviews.

Two of the women began fostering as early as 1988, and the rest began sometime between 1997 and 2006. The women had been employed as foster care workers from two years to eighteen years, with an average of six years. They cared for as few as one child and as many as 35 children, who stayed with them from four months to two years. Most of the children were newborns, some only a few hours or days old when they arrived at the foster mothers' homes. All of the women said they had legal guardianship of the children, and most of the women described this legal custody through its physical representation, the paper document processed by PGN through the lawyer involved with the adoption case.

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The monthly salary per child they reported varied widely. The two women who started in the 1980s said their pay at that time was 300 to 400 quetzales a month (US$37 to US$50), but that they ended with salaries of 500 to 800 quetzales (US$62 to US$100). However, the other seven women who shared salary information with me, and had started in the early 2000s, reported salaries from 1000 to 2000 quetzales (US$125 to US$250). The remaining woman received the equivalent of the salary she had earned from her professional teaching career (undisclosed amount), which she had quit in order to foster for a friend.

Methods for Data Analysis

As noted, the purpose of the current study is to learn about what Guatemalan foster care workers thought and felt about the economic and affective aspects of their care work and the relationships involved in fostering within the political economic context in which they were experienced. Since opportunities for participant-observation of foster mothers' care work were limited, the data I collected on these women's experiences were limited to their narratives from the interviews. In other words, the data I have are what the women said and how they said it. In my analysis of these narratives, I used two methods: content analysis and emotive language analysis.

I first used content analysis to identify key themes in the women's narratives. As I transcribed the interviews in Spanish, I started an initial list of words, themes, and phrases. I then coded the transcriptions, developing the list as I went along and frequently returning to the interviews to code newly emerging themes. Sample themes include: reasons for fostering; daily routine; evaluation of biological parents, adoptive parents, and employers; work training; misdeeds; sadness; ambivalence; love; resources; and wages. I was then able to compare all

comments on a particular theme or to evaluate the frequency of certain words or phrases over others.

The main framework I used for analyzing the foster mothers' narratives was emotive language as disposition, as developed in chapter 1. Since emotive language intertwines with other types of expression (Ahmed 2004:13), content analysis and emotive language analysis often overlapped. For example, some of the themes that emerged from coding the interviews were obviously emotive, such as love, sadness, and ambivalence. Yet, content analysis and emotive language also overlapped in less obviously emotive themes, such as the provision of resources to the children under their care, like clothing or food. I use the term *emotive language* to refer to both direct and indirect expressions of emotion. Bringing Bourdieu's work on habitus and Turner's work on liminality into conversation with emotive language provides a way to conceptualize how emotive language functions both to express personal experiences and to perpetuate unequal structures of power. This understanding of emotive language provided a method for interpreting how the foster mothers felt about their lived experiences and also for analyzing the social and political economic aspects of the foster mothers' care work and of their personal feelings about it.

Yet, applying this theoretical concept of emotive language to one's research requires an operational conceptualization of the many terms involved, including emotive language, management of emotion, reproduction, misrecognition, recognition, and liminality. Since emotive language often differentiates subject from object and is closely tied to other types of speech, identifying emotive language requires a broad range of indicators that go beyond the simple naming of emotion to include references of social relationships. Indicators of emotive language include: 1) the use of words or metaphors that name or refer to particular emotions,

such as "afraid," "love," "happy," "emotional," or "heart;" 2) the use or omission of possessive pronouns when referring to relationships with others, such as "my child" versus "the child;" 3) content that refers to closeness or distance with others; 4) the use of diminutives or nicknames, either as terms of endearment or contempt; 5) references to physical activities associated with certain emotions, such as preparing favorite food for someone or intentionally avoiding someone; 6) references to physical objects with special meaning or memories attached to them, such as photographs or letters; 7) non-verbal expression, such as laughing, crying, clenching hands, or lowering eyes; 8) description of others' reactions or relationships to oneself or others, for example, "When it was time to go live with the adoptive family, the child clung to me and didn't want to go;" 9) intonation, for example, lowering of the voice may depict sadness; and 10) talk or writing that elicits an emotional response in the listener or reader.

The management of emotion of and by employees, in this case foster mothers and lawyers or adoption facilitators, requires employees either to induce or suppress feelings in order to produce emotional responses in others. Indicators of this type of management of emotion include 1) explicit statements about controlling one's emotions or being asked to control them by others, for example, "The lawyer told me not to get too attached to the child;" 2) statements about one's actions in regards to the client, in this case either the adoptive parents or the children, such as, "I sent the adoptive parents weekly email updates to show them how well the child was doing;" 3) a sudden change in subject matter or a tendency to shift the topic of discussion from one's own feelings or relationships to those of the client; 4) a change in composure during the interview, such as beginning to cry, then clearing one's throat and continuing in a steady voice; 5) conditional statements, such as "I should have;" and 6) contradictions in the details regarding one's relationship with others or one's emotional state.

All language takes places within a larger context and draws on ideologies of race, class, and gender. Indicators of the reproduction of inequalities, then, are explicit or implicit references to discourses of race, gender, and class, or other underlying taken-for-granted assumptions. Indicators of reproduction include 1) evaluative statements about others made without reference to underlying factors, for example, "The birth mother didn't even cry when she gave up her child in the lawyer's office;" 2) conditional statements, such as, "I loved them as if they were my kids;" and 3) justification statements about others' decisions or actions, for example, "The adoptive parents don't stay in contact because they simply don't have time."

Misrecognition coincides with reproduction, but emphasizes the unconscious aspect of reproduction. Indicators of misrecognition include 1) statements that implicitly equate objective facts with subjective evaluations, for example, equating a biological mother's lack of tears with a lack of love for the child; and 2) contradictions or inconsistencies between what is being reproduced and what is being specifically said, such as, "I loved them as if they were my children." The meaning of the woman's words, that she felt a mother's love for the children, is inconsistent with the underlying ideology her statement reproduces, one that privileges and differentiates biological relations over social ones.

Indicators of recognition, of the possible questioning of inequalities, include 1) explicit discussion about inequalities; 2) discussions of change; 3) uneasiness over discussing a particular topic, such as the exchange of money in adoption; and 4) ambivalence toward a particular topic, such as a foster mother commenting that she is happy that the child is going to live in the United States, but that this is also bad because the child will lose his culture.

Finally, liminal positions are defined by their ambiguity, and people in liminal positions may experience ambivalence about these aspects of their positions. Indicators of ambiguity

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include 1) the use of the subjunctive mood (Turner 1977[1969]:127); 2) expressions of hope or uncertainty; and 3) contradictory descriptions of a particular phenomenon, for example, describing a relationship as both temporary and permanent. Indicators of ambivalence include 1) the use of comparative terms—such as good, better, and best—in contradictory ways; 2) expressions of seemingly opposing feelings about a particular phenomenon, such as being both happy and sad about a child's departure; 3) the use of honesty phrases, such as *honestly* or *the truth is* (Edwards and Fasulo 2006); and 4) the use of the conjunction *but*.

The historical overview of race, exploitation, class, gender, and corruption at the beginning of this chapter describes the contentious political economic context from which US-Guatemalan transnational adoptions arose and in which foster mothers lived, worked, and made sense of their experiences. Chapters 3 through 6 are my analysis of the women's narratives as expressed to me during interviews with them. These chapters attempt to answer the following questions: How did private-sector foster mothers in Guatemala experience and make sense of their seemingly ambiguous paid care work within the context of US-Guatemalan transnational adoption in which their experiences occurred? What are the meanings that these women gave to this particular bundle of commodified labor and affective caring?

CHAPTER 3

LIKE A MOTHER TO HER CHILDREN:

THE BOTHNESS OF FOSTERING

Fostering Guatemalan children awaiting adoption to the United States can be understood as a type of paid care work that included both affective and economic relationships with others. Although the cultural context in which foster mothers provided care work tends to cast care and family as distinct categories from work and market, fostering children was paid work that involved caring for children in a familial way as part of the larger transnational adoption market. The women provided for the needs of the children around-the-clock and in their own homes, often developing close, kin-like relationships with them. Fostering was also their employment for which they received monetary compensation. As members of the culture in which they provided care work, the foster mothers I interviewed would have learned the cultural distinction between care and work, and family and market. However, their employment as foster mothers muddled the boundaries between these spheres. Given the ambiguities underlying their care of the children, how did these women conceive of their care work and their relationships with others— as paid mothers, caring employees, or something else?

The concept of liminality provides a useful framework for analyzing the experiences of these foster mothers. Within this framework, paid foster care workers are liminal *personae*, or "threshold people." According to Turner, the qualities of liminal persons and spaces are necessarily ambiguous because they "elide or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (1977[1969]:95). The foster mothers' care of the children appears ambiguous, then, because it was both caring and economic, and because the relationship between foster mother and child was both kin-like and non-kin as well as both temporary and permanent. Did the women experience their fostering as liminal, as neither kin

nor non-kin, as neither care nor market, as neither temporary nor permanent? Did they express or acknowledge the ambiguity of their position and, if so, does this necessarily mean they felt ambivalent toward their care work and the relationships they developed with others associated with the adoption process?

To better understand how the foster mothers experienced caring for children within the context of the transnational adoption process in Guatemala, we must understand from their perspective the nature of their relationships with the children under their care, the biological parents, the prospective adoptive parents, and their employers. Although I argue in previous and later chapters that the economic and the affective are not mutually exclusive concepts and are often intertwined in daily experiences, I nevertheless find it analytically useful to first distinguish them, to the extent possible, before discussing the ways in which they intertwine. In this chapter, I focus on the affective aspects of the foster mothers' care work in terms of kinship and, more specifically, mothering. I examine the economic aspects of their care work more fully in chapters five and six.

In the current chapter I examine how the foster mothers I interviewed described their relationships with the children under their care. The first section of the chapter is an analysis of the women's understandings of mothering in terms of the putative dichotomy of biological versus social. The second and third sections examine how the women described their relationship with the children as being similar to that of a mother in terms of physical and emotional closeness, and then how the women also described their relationships with the children as being different from that of a mother in terms of the temporary versus permanent nature of the relationship. Focusing on the issue of children's sleeping arrangements, the fourth section looks at how the women expressed both emotional closeness to and distance from the children under

their care,[11] and examines the meaning of this seeming contradiction in terms of ambivalence and what I refer to as "bothness." In the final section of the chapter, I explore the foster mothers' narratives about la entrega, the day the children left their foster homes to join their adoptive parents, as a salient moment that highlights many of the ambiguities involved with their position, concluding that the women expressed a "bothness," rather than an ambivalence, toward their relationship with the children for whom they cared.

<u>As if They Were Like *Which* Mothers?</u>

Other scholars have found that care workers, especially day care providers, often describe their relationship with the children under their care by likening it to mothering (Nelson 1990). The foster mothers I interviewed also did this. All ten women described their relationships with the children as kin-like. They used the phrase *como si fuera* (as if I were, even though I wasn't) to describe their relationship and their families' relationships with the children under their care. The most common use of the phrase was some variation of *como si fueran mis hijos* (as if they were my children, even though they weren't) or *como si fuera su mamá* (as if I were their mother, even though I wasn't). The use of the imperfect subjunctive tense (fuera/fueran) in this way is both a confirmation of similarity and a negation of sameness, and Spanish speakers understand this duality as part of the meaning of what is expressed with this phrase (Hualde et al. 2010:275). According to Turner (1969:127), the subjunctive mood is often used in describing liminal experiences, as a way to express the potentiality of what otherwise falls between cultural categories. By using the phrase *como si fuera*, these women were clearly acknowledging that,

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[11] I discuss the literature regarding the emotional attachment and distance of paid care workers in chapter 1. In the analysis of the foster mothers' narratives, I have chosen to use the terms *emotional closeness* and *emotional distance* because I also discuss physical closeness and distance as well as the relationship between emotional and physical closeness and distance. By *emotional closeness* I mean feelings of strong interconnection with another. By *emotional distance* I mean feelings of separation from another. Both closeness and distance "can be accomplished through both cognitive and behavioral means" (Hess 2002:664), a point I develop throughout the chapter.

although the relationship was similar to a familial bond, it was not one: as if they were mothers to the children, even though they were not; as if the children were part of the family, even though they were not. In other words, the phrase *como si fuera* expresses both a possession of certain qualities and a lack of other qualities.

Given that the foster families represented the liminal space between the biological and adoptive families in the adoption process, what did it mean to the foster mothers to be like mothers to these children? Culturally constructed notions of kinship—of which motherhood is a part—have traditionally been understood as biological relationships. Therefore, one possible interpretation of the prevalence of the use of the phrase *como si fuera su mamá* in the women's narratives is that these foster mothers understood kinship in biological terms. Whether or not kinship is currently most commonly understood in terms of blood ties, this is how the women often referred to it. Since all of the women had given birth to and raised at least one child, these women knew what it was to be a mother because of their experiences raising biological children. For example, in reference to one of the children for whom she cared, Olga stated, "I had one that was three hours old when they gave him to me. Three hours old. Well, I practically had him like he was my own. Like part of me because he was so tiny and, um, it was something very special." In this instance, Olga described her relationship with the child in biological terms, in other words, as if the child were her biological son, as if she had given birth to him. Although Olga implied the lack of a biological relationship to the child in stating that he was like her own, her emphasis was on the qualities she shared with biological mothers: the child as part of oneself, being the child's first home, and providing the love he needed.

Another possible interpretation is that the foster mothers understood kinship in social rather than biological terms. Many of the times the foster mothers used the phrase *como si fuera*

their understanding of the "likeness" to which they appealed was ambiguous; it could have been biological or social. For example, shortly after explaining to me that she had legal custody of the children because the biological mothers had decided they could not keep them, Eliza stated, "The children begin to call you mom, as if they were your sons and daughters. At one time, I thought that, if one of them was not able to leave, she could stay with me." Since Eliza had referred to biological mothers previous to this statement, she could have meant that the children were like her biological sons and daughters. However, she could have also meant that the children were like her adoptive sons and daughters since she followed the statement with an implicit reference to the adoptive parents: if the adoptive parents did not come for the children, she could keep them. Eliza, then, could have meant instead "as if they were my adoptive children." The ambiguity of Eliza's statement—ambiguous because of cultural distinctions between biological and social relationships—suggests a third possible interpretation: that the foster mothers understood kinship, and mothering specifically, in both biological and social terms.

Regardless of whether the foster mothers were referring to biological parents, adoptive parents, or both at any given time, the women seemed most concerned with comparing their own relationship with the children to "mothers" generally, based on socially constructed ideals that depict mothers as the primary providers of love, emotional support, and instrumental care for their children without regard to personal sacrifice and that depicts motherhood as an intense emotional bond between mother and child (Nelson 1990; Stølen 1996:176; MacDonald 2010:10). Through the use of the phrase *como si fuera* and in other ways, the foster mothers emphasized the similarity between themselves and "mothers" (as if they were their mothers), suggesting that they may have felt the need to validate their position as mothers in relation to the children and to have the depth of their emotions understood. By emphasizing the ways in which they were like

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mothers, the women were able to relay the intensity of their feelings, concern, and closeness to

these children in a way that others—me, in this case—could understand.[12]

Like a Mother to Her Child

In talking about their care of the children, the foster mothers conveyed a sense of being

like mothers to the children and discussed a number of ways in which they were similar to

mothers. One way the women were similar to mothers was their provision of around-the-clock

care to assure the children's physical and emotional needs were met. The children lived in their

homes and the women's routines centered on caring for the children. When I asked her to

describe her daily routine while the children were staying in her home, Corina said, "Like that of

a mom, you know, their breakfast, their food, their clean clothes, cleaning up after them, bathing

them. Like they are…like they were my daughters." Most of the women talked at length about

their routines and, in addition to the activities Corina listed, mentioned changing their diapers,

putting them snugly in bed, talking to them, giving them love, exercising their muscles, going for

walks for the fresh air, and playing with them.

The day-to-day care of children required the foster mothers to be physically close to the

children. In describing their physical closeness to the children they also conveyed an emotional

closeness with them. Several women added that these physical activities were done with love and

patience. Yet, even without such direct statements, I had already understood this to be so. In

recounting their routines to me, some women smiled and others' eyes welled up with tears as

they remembered their experiences. Several foster mothers used hand gestures to demonstrate the

activities they were describing: reaching out their arms to accept a child from the agency,

holding their hands apart to estimate the length of a newborn child, and moving imaginary little

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[12] The similarities of the historical dominant gender ideologies of the US and of Latin America are discussed in chapter 1.

feet in a playful back and forth motion. When describing the children, many of the women also used the diminutive form of certain words, by adding the suffix –*ito* or –*ita*. While the use of the diminutive in Spanish may be used to signify the small size of something, it is also often used as a sign of affection. For example, Olga explained that her daily routine included "exercising their muscles, you know, their little legs, their little arms, little head, shoulders, and you do all that with them daily, you know. And, and move them, cuddle them." The diminutive here—*piernitas* (little legs), *bracitos* (little arms), and *cabecita* (little head)—represents both meanings: the baby's legs, arms, and head would indeed have been very small, but Olga was also expressing affection for the child, evidenced by the soft, raised pitch of her voice and the addition of the word *apapachar* (cuddle).

Fostering premature infants was not uncommon for these women. Three of the women explained that they had received babies so tiny that they had to feed them with a dropper and hold them very close to their own bodies. Sara, who took care of a premature baby girl for seven months, explained, "I had to feed her with a dropper, with a syringe. I had her like a little kangaroo. Because she was very premature." As she said this, she held her arms close to her chest to demonstrate. Sara's description of her care for this infant closely resembles a type of preterm infant care known as kangaroo mother care (KMC).

A Colombian physician first introduced KMC in 1978 as a way to provide alternative care for low birth weight infants in developing countries with scarce hospital resources, such as Guatemala (Tessier et al. 1998). In place of an incubator, KMC utilizes skin-to-skin contact between infant and caregiver to regulate the infant's temperature, and medical studies have found that KMC improves the infant's cognitive development, respiratory health, and physiological

maturation (Feldman et al. 2002). For these reasons, KMC has been integrated with incubator

care in developed countries like the United States.

Sara's intense physical closeness, then, was necessary for the survival and development

of the baby girl under her care. In addition to the physiological and cognitive health benefits of

KMC, skin-to-skin contact has been found to enhance the psychological process of maternal

closeness and bonding between child and caregiver (Tessier et al. 1998; Feldman et al. 2002).

Sara's recounting of her "little kangaroo" reflects this connection between physical and affective

closeness. Through her description of physical closeness, Sara conveyed an equally intense

emotional closeness, since she immediately followed the statement above by telling me she cried

when the girl left because she wanted to keep her.

In sum, the foster mothers provided both affective and instrumental care, and were both

physically and emotionally close to the children under their care. Many of them viewed this

closeness as important to the children's well-being. When I asked Eliza why she decided to

foster, she explained that, in addition to helping her family financially, she began fostering "to be

close to the children who were not with their biological parents and could not yet be with their

adoptive parents." Eliza acknowledged the importance of, and her willingness to provide,

closeness. She contrasted her ability to provide the closeness needed by the children with the

distance of the biological parents—who were no longer, or never had been, close to the

children—and the distance of the adoptive parents—who, although at some point in the future

would be, were not yet close to the children. The distance of both the biological and adoptive

parents allowed her—in fact, required her—to meet the children's physical and emotional needs.

During the liminal period when the children were living with the foster mothers in their homes,

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these women were most like mothers to the children than anyone else, and yet, they were not the children's mothers.

Only "Like" a Mother to Her Child

Although the foster mothers were like mothers to the children under their care in many ways, they were also only "like" mothers to these children. During the interviews, the women acknowledged that they were not the children's mothers and discussed several ways in which they were different from mothers to these children. Their choice of words when referring to children reflected their awareness that the children were not "their" children, that the women were not the children's mothers. I asked the women about both their biological and foster children. Given that the women had conveyed much affection for and closeness to the children they fostered, I expected to find the words they used when referring to these children to be similar to the words they used when referring to their biological children. What I found instead was a markedly consistent differentiation between the two.

In most instances, the women referred to their biological children as variations of *mis hijos* (my sons and daughters) and to the children they fostered as variations of *los niños* (the children). The distinction being made here is twofold: 1) the personal possessive adjective *mis* versus the definite article *los* and 2) the kin term *hijos* versus the general term *niños*. The noun *hijos* and the adjective *mis* are both terms of relation that convey a sense of belonging, that is, that the sons and daughters belonged to the women's kin group or family. In contrast, the noun *niños* and the article *los* are generic terms void of relation; they make no claim of belonging or membership to the women's families.

In her research on parents who could hear and their children who had been diagnosed with deafness, Gabriela Planas (2006) noted that parents referred to their children as *mis hijos*

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(my sons and daughters) when talking about times prior to the diagnosis and referred to them as *los chicos* (the kids) when speaking about times after the diagnosis. Planas suggests that the change in terms prior to and post diagnosis marked the parents' objectification of their children—an emotional and relational distancing—in order to deal with a difficult situation. Despite the clear differences in the two cases, I suggest that the distinction between *mis hijos* and *los niños* by the foster mothers I interviewed served a similar purpose. *Mis hijos* emphasized the closeness of the foster mothers' relationship with her biological children, while *los niños* conveyed a protective emotional distance between the foster mothers and foster children.

The women did occasionally use possessive adjectives to describe the children they fostered—for example, *mis niños* (my children) or *mi bebé* (my baby)—and definite articles to describe their biological children—for example, *la hija* (the daughter) or *el varón* (the male child)—but only about five percent of the time. Also, the women did use *mis hijos* to refer to the children they fostered, but each time they did so, it was preceded by a variation of the phrase *como si fueran*. While the use of *como si fueran* (as if they were) emphasizes the closeness of the relationship, it also acknowledges that they were not the children's mothers (even though they were not). The consistent use of *los niños* to refer to the foster children further highlights the women's awareness that the children were temporarily staying in their homes and did not "belong" to them or their families.

The women's acknowledgement can be seen further at moments in their interviews when they discussed their biological families' relationship with the foster children. For example, in talking about her family's relationship with the children she fostered, Julia said, "Everyone loved them very much, they loved them very much, they have loved all the children (los niños) that I had. They really loved them. And, and like they had been part of the family." Although the

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children are "like" a part of the family, they remain "los niños," not quite part enough of the family to be called hijos. When I asked Juliza what her biological children thought about the fact that the children she was fostering would be leaving, she said "my daughters became very attached to them. When they left, my daughters cried." She then told me that one of her biological children asked her why the foster children could not stay, to which she said she responded, "Well, my son, I said to him, because they aren't mine, I can't have many children." She then added, "yes, they became very attached to them, I did too. I kept crying for the children." Juliza clearly expressed the emotional closeness she and her biological children felt for the foster children, while also explicitly acknowledging that the children were not hers.

One of the ways in which the foster mothers were different from mothers was that caring for these children was their paid employment. As such, the foster mothers were subject to their employers' rules regarding their care of and relationship to the children. With their biological children, these women (and their spouses) had made their own decisions about how to raise the children. With the foster children, however, the women had less autonomy in decision-making; their employers often put restrictions on the type of care they were to provide.[13]

Another way in which the women were different from mothers was that part of their care work was to prepare the children to become part of another family, their adoptive family. One way they prepared the children was by showing them photographs of the adoptive parents. All the women I interviewed said they were asked to show the children under their care photographs of the adoptive parents so they could learn to recognize them as their parents. Julia explained that the adoptive parents:

> always sent us photos so that, that they told us, sorry, that we would show [the children] that they were dad and mom, and that [the children] also had little brothers or sisters

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[13] Employers' regulation of foster mothers' care of the children will be discussed in more detail in chapters 5 and 6.

there. So that they'd see these. They asked us as a favor to explain this to [the children]. That we would always show them the photos, you know, so that they got used to, to calling them dad and mom.

In addition to simply showing the children these photographs, the foster mothers began to create the relationship between the children and the adoptive parents by repeatedly—sometimes on a daily basis—using kin terms to identify the people in the photos. For example, Olga told me, as she pointed to the people in the photographs, she would say to the child, "And the parents, mom, she is mom, dad, brother, yes, you are going to have a brother." By matching the faces with kin terms, the foster mothers were assisting the adoptive parents in the early stages of the process of kinning,[14] in helping the children understand that they were part of that family. While kinning is usually understood as an intragroup process involving the child's parents and other relatives, the activities of the foster mothers demonstrates that non-kin may also play a significant part in the kinning process for another family.

Yet, this activity also reinforced that the foster mother was only "like" a mother; she was not the mom in the photograph. The foster mothers' experiences, then, reflect both the inclusionary and exclusionary aspects of kinning. By attempting to cultivate a closeness between the children and adoptive parents, the women created distance between the children and themselves, reinforcing the temporary nature of their relationship with the children. When I asked how she prepared one of the children for leaving, Corina said, "we had photos of the family. And we said that she [the adoptive mother] was her mom, and she called me aunt. I was like her family but she didn't call me mom but aunt. And that her mom was coming for her." Much in the way children in the United States call close family friends "aunts" or "uncles," in Spanish *tía* (aunt) is often used to express the closeness of a relationship that, although it is not

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[14] As noted in chapter 1, kinning is the process by which a person "is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people, and [in which] the connection is expressed in a conventional kin idiom" (Howell 2006:8).

kin, is a special non-kin relationship that is like family. Although *tía* is a kin term, it signifies a more distant relationship to the child than *mamá* (mom), and it captures the complexity of the women's relationships with the children while they lived in their homes. They were like mothers to the children even though the children were not their sons and daughters and they were not their mothers.

<div align="center">The Emotional Closeness of Sleeping Apart</div>

The complexity of the women's relationship with the children they fostered is reflected throughout their narratives. When recounting the period when the children lived in their homes, the foster mothers at times expressed an emotional closeness to the children and at other times expressed an emotional distance toward them. While the coexistence of expressions of closeness and distance may seem to reveal the women's ambivalent feelings toward the children, I believe it reflects instead the ambiguities of the context in which their relationship with the children occurred. The women's discussions about the children's sleeping arrangements provide an example of the women's consistent expressions of affection toward and concern for the children under their care despite the ambiguous, occasionally contradictory, context of US-Guatemalan transnational adoption in which the relationships occurred.

Some of the women had their biological children sleep in the same bed with them when they were younger, while the others had their biological children sleep in cribs either in the same room or a nearby room. Yet when I asked the women where the children they fostered slept, most of them responded that the children slept in cribs or beds apart from them. To more fully understand why the women made different decisions regarding the sleeping arrangements of their biological children and their foster children, we need to place their decision to do so within the larger context of parenting literature regarding children's sleep.

The location of where children sleep in relation to their primary caregivers—usually the parents—is an actively debated issue within parenting advice literature in the United States. The debate over children's sleep pits proponents of what is called "sleep training" against those who support "cosleeping." Sleep training involves children sleeping in separate quarters from parents with minimal parental responsiveness. Advocates of sleep training, represented and largely based on the work of Dr. Richard Ferber, argue that solitary sleep develops independence and helps children learn to regulate their own sleep. Opponents of sleep training caution that it damages the child's trust in the parent and interferes with adequate care of the child. Cosleeping involves parents and children either sharing the same sleeping surface (bedsharing) or the same sleeping quarters (roomsharing). Proponents of cosleeping, represented and largely based on the works of Dr. William Sears, argue that shared sleep is natural, improves secure parent-child attachment, provides emotional security, allows parents to be more responsive to children's needs, and prevents sudden infant death syndrome. However, opponents of cosleeping argue that it is unsafe (associating it with accidental smothering and sudden infant death syndrome), causes dependency, is not normal in the cultural context of the United States, and causes sleep problems (Ramos and Youngclarke 2006).

Although some parenting advice books are written by authors with no professional credentials, a medical perspective on child sleep predominates in parenting advice books, the majority of which typically supports sleep training, the position supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics (Ramos and Youngclarke 2006). Yet, the contradictory information about the benefits and hazards of cosleeping can be found both in the scientific, medical research on child sleeping and in popularized interpretations of such research, in part because both types of literature, and both sleep training and cosleeping camps, are based on cultural understandings

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and assumptions about where children should sleep (McKenna and McDade 2005:136; Ramos and Youngclarke 2006). Sleep training became the accepted cultural norm, supported by medical research that, as James J. McKenna and Thomas McDade (2005) persuasively show, was itself based on cultural assumptions. Early sleep studies used as test conditions the socially accepted practice at that time (infants sleeping alone with little parental contact), determined that this was healthy for children, and established it as the sleep model. Rather than test different types of child sleep arrangements, further studies simply replicated the original test conditions, thus validating as "scientific" the popular, culturally-specific, and historically-located belief that sleep training was best for children (McKenna and McDade 2005).

Many parents in the United States have very strong feelings regarding the child sleep debate and position themselves firmly within one camp or the other. However, studies have found that, in practice, parents often use a combination of sleep training and cosleeping (Ramos and Youngclarke 2006), and that more parents are opting, at least at times, to share their beds or bedrooms with their children (McKenna and McDade 2005). Although the reasons behind decisions to cosleep may differ, the recommendation of cosleeping proponents mirrors the practices in many other cultures, including those of Central America, where shared parent-child sleeping space is a normal, unquestioned practice (McKenna 2007). One study found that cosleeping in the highlands of Guatemala was a common practice, associated with parental affection and development of interdependency (Morelli et al. 1992). My conversations with the foster mothers suggest that cosleeping may also be commonly practiced among Ladinos.

These different culturally-constructed understandings about cosleeping were part of the larger context in which Guatemalan foster mothers cared for children, and they informed the women's decisions about how to best care for the children. Despite the multiple beliefs and

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practices regarding children's sleep among parents in the United States—of which adoptive parents are a subset, the foster mothers appear to have based their own decisions about where to have the children sleep on their belief that (all) adoptive parents would have the children sleep in separate quarters, in other words, that they were proponents of sleep training.

For example, Olga explained that, when one of the children she fostered got scared during the night and came into her room, she allowed the child to crawl into her bed, but only until her fear subsided: "Once her fear passed, she went to go sleep in her bed. Knowing, well, that when she would leave with her adoptive parents, she was going to have [her bed] separate…at any rate, uh, so that the adjustment wouldn't be difficult for her." Olga expressed the perceived importance of maintaining distance during sleep so that the child would have an easier time adjusting to her adoptive parents, whom Olga believed would not allow the child to share their bed with them. Although I did not ask Olga how she knew this about the adoptive parents, the foster mothers' responses to the question of why they had the children sleep in separate quarters from them provide some insight. Several of the women explained that their employers had told them not to sleep with the children so that they would become accustomed to sleeping apart, would not become too attached to the foster mothers and, would be more receptive to the adoptive parents. Although the women may have already held preconceived notions about parenting in the United States through other means, such as the media or family members living abroad, the women's employers relayed to and reinforced in the women the beliefs that adoptive parents preferred the practice of sleep training and that this practice was better for the children.

Many of the women appeared to agree with their employers' regulation about separate sleeping spaces, as eight of the ten women told me the children slept in a crib either in their room

or in another room of the house. Of the two who said the children slept in the same bed with them, one was fostering the child for a friend, not for an agency, and the other told me that the agency's rule did not feel right to her, so she simply disregarded it. Most of the women, however, seemed to agree with the policy and the reasons for it. For example, Zulma explained that "many women make the mistake of sleeping with the children. They cling to you. And that is bad, it isn't good. But, I know that love exists, but only when they are sick, or when it's very cold, when it's raining or something. There are moments, but their little crib has to be there, always their little crib. Because otherwise they get attached to you." Zulma and other foster mothers, probably in large part because they had been told so by their employers, equated allowing children to sleep in their beds with the children becoming too attached to them, and viewed both types of closeness as wrong and bad. Distancing oneself emotionally from the children, represented here by distancing oneself physically during sleep, would help the children do the same, and she evaluated this as correct and good. Although Zulma acknowledged that love exists, she emphasized that it should be kept in check. Although easing the children's immediate discomfort or pain—comforting them when they were sick or providing warmth when they were cold—seems to have taken precedence over any perceived pain that this demonstration of physical and emotional closeness may cause the children in the future, the women regarded these moments as clear exceptions to the rule.

Regardless of the origin or accuracy of such beliefs, the projected, future physical distancing of the adoptive parents created the perceived need for distance in the present, and this became a requirement of fostering. Employers expected foster mothers to be close to the children, but not too close. While physical closeness was necessarily part of their care work, they were also expected to maintain some physical distance. What was ultimately most important was

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reinforcing distance between foster mother and child, represented here by the crib's constant presence. What the imposed rule seems to have been enforcing, then, was an emotional distance between child and foster mother.

The women received advice on sleep training and on maintaining some distance generally from the children from lawyers, facilitators, doctors, and psychologists. The professional veneer of this advice held weight with the foster mothers, giving it a validity over their popularly-held beliefs about cosleeping and the importance of closeness. For example, Zulma also stated:

> I'm going to be very sincere, with the first child that I took care of, yes, I felt so deeply devoted to him...when that child left, I saw that he was very sad, he left when he was almost a year old. I saw on his little face how very sad he was. After that, I said to myself, no, this isn't good. Then, the psychologist, she was a friend of ours, explained to me that it wasn't good because it harms the child, not you, the child. And that's what I learned.

Zulma wanted to keep the first child she fostered because she had become so attached to him. Yet, when he left, she saw that he was sad. From this painful first experience, she learned that emotional distance was good for the children and closeness could be harmful. She did not mention the pain it also caused her until I asked her directly if she too was hurt by the experience, to which she answered, "yes, because one spends perhaps three or four days crying. I entered my room, saw his little crib, and started crying, crying." Processed through the advice of a psychologist, who is also a friend (thus, doubly trustworthy), Zulma learned to evaluate getting too emotionally close to the children as bad for them, that distancing oneself protected the children.

While some women who fostered probably felt ambivalent toward the children from time to time, the narratives of the women I interviewed suggest an alternate interpretation: that the women felt emotionally close to the children, but the context in which they cared for these children also required them to maintain distance. I understand this coexistence not as an

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ambivalence on their part but as a "bothness"—an understanding or acceptance of the nuanced intertwining of otherwise putatively ambiguous concepts. Although many of the women chose cosleeping arrangements with their biological children, within the context of fostering children during the transnational adoption process, they came to understand the physical distance promoted by sleep training (separate sleeping quarters) to be beneficial to the children's well-being. The expression of their physical and emotional distance to the children, then, may be understood, not as an ambivalence toward the children, but as a further expression of the women's concern and affection for the children, expressed in this particular context through emotional distancing.

The Bothness of Saying Goodbye

The women I interviewed expressed bothness most saliently when they talked about the children's day of departure from their homes, what they referred to as la entrega. The word *entrega* means a handing over or delivery of something, in this case, of someone. Yet, for these women, the entrega held a much deeper significance. The day a foster mother handed over a child to the adoptive parents was the point at which closeness and distance converged most abruptly for her. It was the end of her employment as that child's caregiver and the end of her physical closeness to the child. It was a time at which the women were made acutely aware of the temporary nature of their care work. Despite this, many of the women described their emotional relationship to the children as continuing past the entrega into the present, as a permanent part of their fostering experience.

The foster mothers' descriptions of the basic logistics of the entrega were remarkably similar. Most entregas occurred at the hotel where the adoptive parents were staying, usually in Guatemala City since the airport and the US Embassy are located there. The foster mothers

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usually took the children to the hotel, although occasionally the lawyer in charge of the adoption forbade them from doing so and sent an agency supervisor to pick up the children from their homes instead. Once at the hotel, the lawyers spoke with the adoptive parents, while the foster mothers sat quietly or walked around with the children. Some foster mothers said they were unable to speak with the adoptive parents, either because the adoptive parents did not speak Spanish, the lawyer did not permit them to do so, or both. Other women said they were able to speak with the adoptive parents, but the conversations were always centered on the children.

Many of the foster mothers conveyed their experience of the abruptness of the entrega. From the day of the children's arrival the foster mothers knew the children would be leaving. They were also aware that the day of the entrega was fast approaching once all the legal procedures had been completed. Even so, when they received the call from the lawyer's office telling them that it was time to hand over the children, it came as a shock. For example, when I asked Irma if she had prepared herself for the children's departure, she responded, "No. You believe you're going to be prepared, you think, yes, I am going to try to be calm and eveything, but when you receive the phone call, you feel like they are going to yank out your heart." She sighed deeply, her eyes filled with tears, and she added, "it's hard, hard, hard." She felt as if her heart had been yanked (*arrancado*) from her chest. The verb *arrancar* expresses the suddenness of the action and the violent onset of pain.

Despite the clear demarcation between being and no longer being the children's caregivers, many of the women conveyed a type of permanence to the relationship. Danielle Wozniak (2004) found a similar sense of permanence in the narratives of foster mothers in the United States. One part of the experience that endured—or was caused by—the entrega was the women's feelings of sadness and love. Although most of the women said that they were happy

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for the children and the adoptive parents, and that they believed adoption to the United States was the best option for these children, they, like Irma, expressed great sadness over the loss they felt when the children joined their adoptive parents. As they spoke to me of their past sadness over the entrega, many of them choked up or shed a few tears, the pain still clearly part of the present. When I asked Sara how she felt about the departure of the children, she said with tears in her eyes, "Oh, [I was] happy, uh, happy and sad with a knot in my throat from…uncertainty… I always wanted to go to the United States…because that is where all my, that is where my broken heart is, in a pile of little pieces." As with Irma, Sara expressed her sadness in terms of a damaged heart. When the children left, they took a piece of her heart with them. Despite the physical distance, the deep connection she felt with the children maintains its pull.

Olga also talked about part of herself leaving with the children. She explained, "part of me goes with this child…Um, really he carries my love within him." And a bit later she continued, "you are aware and know that, that you are only going to have them for the short time that the adoption process takes. You know this, but, uh, uh, how to say it, you give all of yourself and that hurts when the child leave." Despite the shortness of their time together, Olga believed—or perhaps needed to believe in order to ease her pain—the love and care she provided for the children is permanent and has lasting effects. Metaphorically, the women and children are still connected since the women's love—symbolized as pieces of their hearts—remains a permanent part of the children.

Many foster mothers also expressed a sense of bothness through the recounting of the children's reaction during the entrega. For example, María said, "I'll never forget that day, that he [the boy] cried for me, mommy, my mommy, he said to me. And he didn't want to be with anyone else, only with me." A few minutes later, when talking about an earlier week-long visit

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by the same adoptive family, she added, "how he cried for me, so they called me, and I had to go there. Because he only wanted to be with me." The way she recounted the child's departure, the child wanted only her, not the adoptive parents. The closeness the child may have felt to the foster mother is clear in the contrast to the child's response to the adoptive parents, still strangers to him. This is further emphasized by the boy calling her "my mommy." Although she spoke kindly about the adoptive parents, and recognized them as the child's parents, up to and at the time of the child's departure, María and María alone was the closest emotionally to the child and who the child wanted to be physically near. The repetition of *mommy* suggests that, despite the restraints put upon their relationship, restraints meant to emphasize its temporary nature, the connection between María and the child was not experienced as one of "foster" mother and her charge, but of mother and child. In their conversations with me, María and the other women never called themselves the children's mothers, and often stated that they were not, but those who recounted instances in which children had addressed them as *mommy* or *mom* did so as a way to express the closeness they themselves felt for, and perhaps even projected onto, the children under their care.

In her research on foster mothers in the United States, Wozniak found that a sense of loss and bereavement became "a permanent marker of motherhood" for the women (2004:89). Although the US foster mothers, unlike the Guatemalan foster mothers, referred to the children as "my children," claimed the status of "mother," and did not conceive of their fostering as a job, the women described the permanence of their relationships with the children in a similar, albeit slightly different, way. Rather than becoming a permanent marker of motherhood, the enduring feelings of the women I interviewed became a permanent marker of being like a mother to the children.

As discussed previously, the only time the women I interviewed referred to themselves as the children's mothers was when the word was paired with the phrase *como si fuera*. These women's use of "mother" within the context of "como si fuera" seemed to include two important elements: unconditional love—love no matter the cost—and permanence. For example, in response to my asking her what she did to prepare herself for the day the child left, María answered, "Well, I just asked God for strength, you know, because [the boy] will possibly leave this week. Oh God, give me strength because it overwhelmed me as if I had been his mom, you know, but it was a thing that, mmm, no. I didn't want him to go." What is "unconditional" here is her love for the child; what is "conditional" here is her status as mother, which is conditional on the situation—on her continued employment, which is also dependent on the adoption situation itself. Her position as the child's care provider, then, is temporary and liminal. She is like a mother to these children, but she is only "like" a mother. What makes her status as mother conditional is its impermanency, the fact that the child would be leaving soon.

The costs of unconditional love were the pain and suffering the women felt knowing that the children would be leaving and again when they actually left. The women conveyed a kind of permanence—a continued emotional bond despite and because of the temporal and physical distance—to their sadness and pain, as a consequence of their love. Since the women continued to feel love, pain, and sadness after the children left their homes, the liminality of the women's foster care work can be understood as a permanent condition (Kelly 2008:335). The foster mothers used the phrase *como si fuera*, then, to emphasize the closeness of their relationship with the children (as a kind of permanence) and the depth of their maternal feelings toward the children, allowing them to bridge the physical separation and temporal distance. Once they were physically distant from the children post-entrega, emotional closeness was what became

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important. But, this emotional closeness was only possible because of their past physical closeness.

Once the children were no longer living in their homes, many of the women continued to feel an emotional closeness to the children despite the physical distance. Many of the women expressed this continued emotional closeness with the children through talk of photographs of the children. Some of the photos were taken while the children were staying with the foster mothers and other photos were taken by the adoptive parents and sent to the foster mothers after the children had left for the United States. All ten women told me that they still have photographs of the children in albums, boxes, frames, lockets, and wallets, and four of them showed me the photos during the interviews. Sara pulled out a large album filled with photographs of every child she had fostered—name, date of birth, and date they left written on the back of each, although she hardly needed to refer to these—as she gently touched the photographs and shared her memories about the children. In talking about the girls she fostered, Corina said, "I have photos of Jazmín all over the place. So we're always together, we'll always have Jazmín here, practically so." Several minutes later she added, "I think about them every day. I have photos of them everywhere, you know. And, yes, I love them very much, and what makes me the happiest is knowing that they are okay. Mm, that makes me very happy. And I know that they aren't my daughters but I love them very much, you know." Even though she understood that the girls were not her daughters, Corina continued to love them as though they were. The photographs, displayed prominently throughout the home, symbolized the continuity of her love and represented the girls' ongoing presence in her life. For these women, their ongoing love and the symbolic presence of the children represent a type of permanency and express the ways in which they continued to be like mothers to these children, thus remaining in

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a type of permanent liminal position, that of being like but only like mothers to the children for whom they cared.

In this chapter, I examined how the foster mothers conceived of their relationships with the children under their care. The foster mothers' narratives point to the liminality of their care work by describing the ways in which they were like mothers to these children and also the ways in which they were only "like" mothers to the children, by expressing both emotional closeness and emotional distance to the children, and by describing their relationships with the children as both temporary and permanent. Despite the seeming ambiguities surrounding their liminal care work, the coexistence of expressions of emotional closeness and distance in the women's narratives reflected the context in which the women provided care—a context that required the women to maintain distance from the children as part of their care work. However, this coexistence of closeness and distance did not indicate that the women felt ambivalent toward the children for whom they cared. Instead, the women expressed a bothness, that is, an understanding or acceptance of the nuanced intertwining of otherwise putatively ambiguous concepts. I used the issue of children's sleeping arrangements to demonstrate that, within a context in which emotional distancing is framed as being in the children's best interests, the expression of physical and emotional distance to children may be understood, not as ambivalence toward the children, but as a further expression of the women's concern and affection for them.

The liminality of the women's positions as foster mothers continued beyond the entrega and became a permanent condition. The women continued to express an emotional closeness to the children by reframing their own love, and the suffering that resulted from it, as a permanent connection with the children. Even after the children had left and no longer had contact with the foster mothers, the women continued to express their emotional closeness to the children in

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physical terms: the women's love, represented as pieces of their hearts, remained with the

children, while memories of the children, preserved through photographs, remained with the

women.

While the phrase *como si fuera* acknowledges the ambiguity of the foster care workers'

status as mothers, it also reflects the bothness required of their liminal foster care position. It

acknowledges the nature of the intimate relationship as it was lived—as a loving relationship,

within their control—and the larger political, social, and legal context of the relationship—what

was predetermined, inevitable, and out of their control. In the next chapter, I begin to address the

larger political economic context by looking at the foster mothers' perceptions toward biological

parents in Guatemala and adoptive parents from the United States, particularly in terms of how

the foster mothers situated their own capacity to provide socioeconomic and affective care to the

children in comparison to the biological and adoptive parents.

CHAPTER 4

BETTER, BEST, AND BETTER BEST: THE FOSTER MOTHERS IN RELATION

TO THE BIOLOGICAL MOTHERS AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS

The foster mothers conveyed their own abilities to care for the children under their guardianship in terms of how they were like mothers to these children. In addition, they shared with me their perceptions about the biological mothers' and adoptive parents' ability, or lack thereof, to care for the children in terms of both socioeconomic and affective capacity. Given the limited contact between the foster mothers and the adoptive parents, and the foster mothers and the biological mothers, this chapter deals less with the foster mothers' relationships "with" these people and more with their perceived relationship "to" them, as a way to gain insight into how they situated themselves and their care work within the liminal space of fostering.

In my conversations with the foster mothers, every one of them used the word *mejor* (better) or *lo mejor* (best) in describing the life that the children would have with their adoptive parents in the United States.[15] I found this intriguing, especially since I did not use this word during the interviews nor did I directly ask them to make comparisons. As a term of comparison, *better* conveys difference, but it also always expresses the superiority of one thing to another and, inversely, implies the inferiority of that other thing to the first. A more detailed examination of the specific ways in which the foster mothers compared the biological mothers', their own, and the adoptive parents' abilities to care for the children provides a further understanding of how the foster mothers experienced their liminal position within the context of care work for transnational adoption.

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[15] The phrase "the best interests of the child" frames much of the discourse on transnational adoption and is the explicit, overarching goal of adoption legislation, including the international Hague Convention. While the foster mothers' use of "best" and "better" in their evaluation of the children's various caregivers suggests the influence of this discourse of "best interests" on them, an analysis of such a correlation is beyond the scope of the current project, as it would require an in-depth, comparative analysis to determine the direction of influence.

I begin this chapter with an examination of the foster mothers' comparisons of the biological mothers' and adoptive parents' capacities to care in terms of misrecognition of socioeconomic factors as affective ones. In the second section, I show how the misrecognition of economic poverty as affective poverty underlies the foster mothers' comparisons of how the biological mothers are less like mothers than themselves. In the third section, I look at how the foster mothers' evaluative statements about their own capacity to provide affective care include indirect comparisons between themselves and the biological mothers, further misrecognizing economic poverty as moral poverty. The fourth section analyzes the foster mothers' expressions of uncertainty about the adoptive parents' affective care as best when discussing their own feelings and experiences in relation to the adoptive parents. I end the chapter with a summary of how the foster mothers' use of the "betterment narrative" to evaluate one's capacity to provide affective care to the children reflects the ways in which they both misrecognized and acknowledged socioeconomic inequalities in an attempt to make sense of their own liminal position as temporary care workers.

<u>Socioeconomically and Affectively</u>
<u>"Better Off There than Here"</u>

The better life the foster mothers believed the children were having in the United States included both socioeconomic and affective improvements, such as a better future, better opportunities, a better home, better things, better education, better love, better care, and even better vitamins. While the perceived improvements in socioeconomic status seem straightforward—the per capita GDP of the United States is nine times higher than that of Guatemala (Central Intelligence Agency 2011), the foster mothers' perception that the children's affective care also improved appears contradictory to their descriptions of their own relationships with the children as kin-like and loving. In this section, I examine the women's use of the word

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mejor (better or best) in their comparisons of the biological mothers' and adoptive parents' capacities to provide both socioeconomic and affective care for the children. I suggest that the foster mothers misrecognized these people's socioeconomic statuses as their capacities to provide affective care. I then raise the question of how the foster mothers situated themselves within this division.

The foster mothers agreed that the better life they believed the children were having with the adoptive parents included enhanced socioeconomic opportunities. One of the women, Eliza, told me that it was undeniable that the children under her care would find a better life in their adoptive homes: "I believe that the children have a much better level of life. That's, it's undeniable. They have an infinitely better social, economic, cultural, and educational level than they had in Guatemala." Eliza asserted that, by comparison to Guatemala, the United States has a higher socioeconomic level than Guatemala and that this higher level is more advantageous, a point on which the women uniformly agreed. Many of the women also mentioned Guatemala's poverty when explaining why it was better for the children to move to the United States.

According to Olga:

> The truth is, um, that there is a great deal of poverty. There is a lot of poverty, and well, I for one thank God that there are families that really think to give, to give the best to those children, to give them what couldn't be given here. Because really here in our country, well, there is a lot of poverty. There are lots of poor children that really can't study, much less eat, nothing. So, they are in extreme poverty.

Olga's repetition of the words *poverty*, *truth*, and *really* emphasized the reality of Guatemala's lower economic level in comparison to the United States for these women. In addition, Eliza described the opportunities in the US as not simply better, but "infinitely better," and Olga described Guatemala as not just having poverty, but "a great deal of poverty" and "extreme poverty." Taken together, these two comments suggest that the women perceived the socioeconomic division between the two countries as wide and, perhaps, insurmountable.

The matter-of-fact way in which foster mothers expressed the comparatively better life they expected the children to have in the United States does more than simply relay an "undeniable" fact. It also reproduced underlying socioeconomic and power inequalities. According to Bourdieu (1977:97), the reproduction of inequalities occurs through the misrecognition of objective dichotomies as subjective ones. Although these women explicitly acknowledged the socioeconomic inequalities between the United States and Guatemala, they simultaneously reproduced them by misrecognizing wealth as good and poverty as bad. They made no reference to the existence of wealth in Guatemala or poverty in the United States. Instead, they equated wealth with the US and poverty with Guatemala, indirectly identifying the US as good and Guatemala as bad. In so doing, they unconsciously reproduced the underlying power structures and history that created such divisions.

The ways the foster mothers talked about "better" in terms of emotional care and love reveals a further misrecognition of socioeconomic status with affective capacity. Emphasizing the inferiority of emotional resources in Guatemala was one of the ways the foster mothers discussed the improved prospects for the children under their care. For example, Sara stated:

> They are children that are better off there than here, you know. Not so much economically but, uh, psychologically, emotionally. They are going to have love there. They aren't going to have it here. Here they are never going to become more than dirty children (*niños sucios*) and...from ten years and up they'll have a future of crime, you know.

She assessed that the children would enjoy superior emotional support "there" than they would experience "here," but left implicit what exactly she meant by "here" and "there." Given the context, "there" clearly referred to both the United States and the adoptive parents, and the "here" referred to the biological parents and Guatemala. Like Eliza's and Olga's comments, Sara's remark reproduced socioeconomic inequalities through the misrecognition of objective facts with subjective qualities. Sara explicitly dismissed the importance of economic factors

("not so much economically"), while implicitly misrecognizing them as the sentimental. She identified the wealth of the adoptive parents in the United States with superior love and the poverty of the biological parents in Guatemala with inferior love. These associations of the United States and adoptive parents with good, wealth, and love, and of Guatemala and biological mothers with bad, poverty, and lack of love were threaded throughout the women's narratives.

The foster mothers' distinction between superior love in the United States and inferior love in Guatemala, however, becomes murkier with the introduction of themselves into the equation. In Sara's statement above, love exists "there," but not "here." Sara had either excluded herself entirely from this comparison of better love, or she had diminished her own love for the children by counting herself among those unable to provide adequate love. Yet, Sara and the other foster mothers also clearly expressed that they loved the children. As the only foster mother I interviewed that still had a child under her care, I was able to see how Sara interacted with the child, holding her on her lap during part of the interview, lovingly teasing her about being *malcriadota* (a bit spoiled) and telling her how much she loved her. Despite the relatively short amount of time I spent with Sara, it was clear that her love for this child would have been more than sufficient.

One possible explanation for these inconsistencies is that, since she and other foster mothers would not have been part of these children's lives had they not been adopted transnationally, Sara may not have perceived herself as part of the "here" in this instance. Nevertheless, she and the other foster mothers were unquestionably part of the "here." They raised their children, lived, and worked in Guatemala; they were *guatemaltecas*. Given the liminal position of their care work, how did the foster mothers situate their own capacity to provide socioeconomic and affective care to the children in comparison to the biological and

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adoptive parents? In this chapter, I address this question in terms of affective care, focusing first on the foster mothers' perceptions of the biological mothers, then on their own care, and concluding with their perceptions of the adoptive parents. In the next chapter, I provide a more detailed account of the socioeconomic aspects of the foster mothers' care work.

<u>Foster Mothers' Evaluation of the Biological Mothers</u>
<u>as Less like Mothers</u>

Of the foster mothers I interviewed, only Sara had spent considerable time with biological mothers. All the other women had only brief encounters with them during the DNA test and legal appointments and were told by their employers not to speak with the biological mothers. Despite this limited contact with the biological mothers, most of the women explicitly expressed generally negative opinions about them. Several of the foster mothers depicted the biological mothers as prostitutes,[16] drunks, or women more concerned about money than their own children. For example, in describing the biological mothers she met, Eliza said, "some [were] happy because that was most certainly also the day they were going to receive their money." The foster mothers' perception of biological mothers as greedy and callous—which at least in part stems from a misrecognition of the economic factors of poverty as personal character flaws—parallels their association of biological mothers with an inferior capacity to love children.

Yet, despite the overarching misrecognition of the biological mothers' poverty as an incapacity to love, the foster mothers at times alluded to a critique, or recognition, of the underlying power structures at play. To an extent, they acknowledged the biological mothers'

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[16] As discussed in chapter 1, the concept of "mothering" in Latin American, because of its inherent suffering symbolized by the Virgin Mary witnessing the death of her son, is associated with virtue. According to Lorraine Nencel, this prevalent ideology also divides women into two groups: "the good woman (the mother) and the bad woman (the whore)" (1996:62). Prostitutes, often referred to as *putas*, are associated with a lack of emotional involvement (Nencel 1996:71).

feelings. For example, after Eliza's statement about the biological mothers' happiness toward receiving money, she conceded that others were "sad [and] upset" during the appointments and appeared to care about the children. Some of the foster mothers were also sympathetic to the biological mothers' poverty, occasionally acknowledging the difficulties related to their socioeconomic situation that resulted in the lack of resources necessary for creating a caring, supportive environment for these children.

For example, most of the foster mothers did not solely blame the biological mothers for their inability to care for their children. Sara and others hinted at a national culpability, in which the "here," whether as an abstract Guatemalan society or as the government in particular, failed in their responsibility to care for the country's most vulnerable. Love existed in Guatemala, but not for these particularly vulnerable children. Had they stayed in Guatemala, according to Sara, the children in her care would have been deprived of love not only by their biological parents but also by the society at large that would have viewed them as "dirty children." Many of the foster mothers mentioned that few Guatemalans would adopt these children due, in part, to ongoing racial and class prejudices. In Sara's view, growing up in an environment that deprived them of love and viewed them as worthless would have led these children inevitably to a life of crime. Sara's assumption was not unreasonable given Guatemala's high crime rate, the large number of children living on the streets, and Guatemala's insufficient child welfare system (Tierney 1997; Centro de Estudios de Guatemala 2009).

Despite these moments in the interviews that suggest the foster mothers' awareness of, and sympathy toward, how extreme poverty makes it difficult to provide an environment in which emotional support can thrive, most foster mothers were ultimately judgmental of the biological mothers and seemed eager to distinguish themselves from these women. One of the

ways foster mothers distinguished themselves from the biological mothers was to show how the biological mothers were less like mothers to the children than they were, by focusing on the affective characteristics of mothering and ignoring the socioeconomic ones. In contrast to depicting themselves as both physically and emotionally close to the children while the children were under their care, the foster mothers described the biological mothers as physically and emotionally distant from the children. For example, some foster mothers explained that the biological mothers maintained physical and emotional distance with the children at the appointments. According to Irma, the biological mother "can even hold her baby, and everything. She can. She can ask me things. We're together quite a while. But they don't want to…they don't want to hold their baby. They don't want anything. They don't want them." Despite the fact that the child is "hers" and that there is sufficient time, the woman, in Irma's eyes, lacks certain qualities of motherhood: she is without sentiment; she is empty and distant.

Several foster mothers called attention to the distance they perceived between biological mothers and children through their descriptions of how the children reacted to the presence of the biological mothers. María, in talking with me about the biological mother during a legal appointment stated, "she asked me for the baby. And when she asked me for him, I gave him to her. The baby didn't want to, in spite of how little he was." In contrast to the biological mothers' refusal to hold the children above, the baby here, despite his young age—which represents the short amount of temporal distance between baby and biological mother—refused her, no longer recognizing her as mother, suggesting that the child understood María as his mother more than he did his biological mother.

Even when the foster mothers recounted a biological mother's affection toward her child, they ultimately dismissed it as insufficient. For example, Julia stated, "the moms…hold them,

they carried them awhile. They showed them affection, and nothing more. There are some moms that didn't even hold them." Julia recognized the status of these women as mothers and acknowledged that some of them still demonstrated affection toward the children and a willingness to be physically close. However, her emphasis was on what the women lacked; they may have shown some affection for the children, but "nothing more:" no maternal love. In contrast, the foster mothers provided both physical and emotional closeness to the children. Framed in this way, the biological mother becomes less like a mother than the foster mother.

Another way the foster mothers distinguished themselves from the biological mothers was by telling me that they would never relinquish a child, again focusing on affective reasons and ignoring socioeconomic ones. María expressed this most strongly: "Ay, no, give up my baby, oh no, I tell you, not a chance, I say. That is the most, is the saddest, I think, but not all of us think the same way, right." Those who do not think the same here are herself and the biological mothers. María's sadness about the idea of giving up a child is deeply personal, since three of her children had died in utero: "I wanted to have children and I lost them. I wanted to have them and they died. And people that are able to have them, don't take advantage of caring for them, of keeping them." Not only would María not relinquish her children, she could not comprehend how someone else could do so. She expressed anger and sadness about the biological mothers' decision to relinquish the child, contrasting herself from the biological mother. Interestingly, she referred to biological mothers here as "people," not "mothers" or even "women," as was usually the case, further suggesting that she perceived them to be less like mothers than she.

Sara—the one who had the most contact with biological mothers—also could not fathom how these women must have felt or how they were able to make such a decision. Sara explained:

Even to this day I have not been able to really understand what they feel when they give them up. Being without children hurts, you know. Uh, they spend nine months with you and, and how do I say this [she sniffles], I, I don't judge them, uh, because I really don't know what goes on in their heads.

Embedded in Sara's statement is an understanding that biological ties to a child should include emotional ties, and that breaking those ties must hurt. Sara did not really know what the biological mothers felt or thought, but she did know that they broke their ties to the children, something she could not imagine doing. By not being able to imagine breaking ties with her children, Sara too expressed how the biological mothers were less like mothers to the children than she was. Although Sara eventually also had to break ties with the same children, the decision to do so was not hers; rather, it was a pre-established condition of her custody of these children.

Despite occasional expressions of sympathy for the biological mothers' socioeconomic situation and hints of their awareness of how economic instability affects care, in their comparisons of the biological mothers with themselves, the foster mothers ultimately misrecognized the biological mothers' economic poverty as affective poverty, as an emotional emptiness. The foster mothers' descriptions of the biological mothers' distance with the children contrasted with depictions of themselves as emotionally and physically close to, and actively caring for, the children. Expressing their inability to fathom relinquishing a child further distinguished them from the biological mothers. By depicting biological mothers as having a lesser capacity to provide affective maternal care than themselves, the foster mothers reinforced their own kin-like closeness with the children and established how the biological mothers were less like mothers than they were.

<u>Foster Mothers' Evaluation of Themselves</u>
<u>as Giving Their Best</u>

In contrast to their negative perceptions regarding the biological mothers' capacity to provide affective care for their children, the foster mothers expressed pride and confidence in their own abilities. They were all raising, or had already raised, their own children, so had experience caring for babies and small children. In addition to this experience, some of the foster mothers recounted how they were even more careful and vigilant with the children they fostered than they had been with their biological children. For example, Corina stated, "we are capable of doing it…I am certain that I am not going to be aggressive with a child that isn't mine, or with mine, much less if he isn't mine." Doris described her abilities as having "a special gift with children." All of the women expressed pride in the quality of care they provided, and many of them stated that they gave the children the best of themselves. For example, Olga stated, "always as a foster mother, I always swore to give them my best." In describing their best, however, most of the foster mothers indirectly compared their own capacity to provide affective care with that of the biological mothers.

When I asked Irma if she would foster again if the opportunity arose, she said, "Yes, yes, I would do it because I am capable of caring, of giving them lots of love, me as well as my sons and daughters, we gave them lots of love. And that is what you should do with these children. They lack lots of love." About half the women I interviewed made reference to the children lacking and needing love, although few directly explained why. From the context, they likely believed that, since the biological mothers—the people who were supposed not just to feel, but to give, "unconditional" love—had relinquished the children, the children had either never experienced what love was or, in the case of older children, had had it taken away from them.

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According to Irma, she had done exactly what one should do with such children; she had filled the void left by the biological mothers by giving the children lots of love.

Sara, speaking in general terms about her experiences fostering, said, "these children come from, from broken families with many problems. So, uh, it's important to give them stability, love. I think that we and their adoptive parents can do it." What did Sara mean by "broken families"? Several assumptions underlie her statement: biological families are "broken," "broken families" are incapable of providing affective care, and foster and adoptive families are "unbroken" or intact. Of the foster mothers I interviewed, seven of the women were married, but only three of them listed their husbands as active members of the household. One was divorced, another widowed, and Sara had never been married. Sara had raised her son without the presence of his father, but did not consider her family broken. The idea of an intact family for the majority of these women, then, most likely meant something other than the existence of an active husband or father. Although nine of the ten women were concerned about their household finances, they lived in homes with electricity and running water and, to varying degrees, had emotional and economic support systems consisting of other household members, parents, siblings, and friends. Perhaps this is what Sara understood to be an intact family.

"Broken" in this instance seems to pertain to the particular type of problems a family has. Even if Sara and her family—as well as the other foster families—had their own "problems," they were never so severe as to cause them to relinquish their children. Although most of the foster mothers gave extreme poverty as a reason they believed biological mothers relinquished their children, as discussed in the previous section they also associated biological mothers with criminal and imprudent behavior such as prostitution and drunkenness. Sara may have understood a "broken family," then, to be one that lacked the moral fortitude to protect its

children. In the foster mothers' narratives, the women seemed to equate the biological mothers' relinquishment of their children with a lack of love for them. Although Sara's reference to the biological families' "problems" alludes to an awareness of their economic hardship, she still assumed that the biological mothers did not love their children, thus misrecognizing an economic poverty rooted in societal and political problems as a personal affective and moral poverty. In so doing, Sara distinguished herself from the biological family and associated herself with the adoptive family, implicitly depicting the foster and adoptive families as more moral, more stable, and more loving than the biological families.

By representing themselves as both capable of and willing to provide care and love to the children—to step in for the biological mothers whom they depicted as incapable and unwilling, the foster mothers reinforced the importance of their position as temporary nurturers in providing the children a better future. This interpretation is supported by one of María's comments: "I gave all my support, love, maternal love…I ask God to guard him, to take care of him, to give him all the love that the [biological] mother couldn't give." María believed that, unlike the biological mother, she was able to provide maternal love to the child. This was important because the child needed to be given this love in order to flourish. Olga provided a similar explanation of why their position was so important, stating, "I knew that what I, that the baby's happiness and development when he was with his adoptive parents were going to depend on the love I gave him, you know." Olga and the other foster mothers understood their role as laying the emotional groundwork for the children's relationships with the adoptive parents, which were dependent on the foster mothers' ability to repair the damage they perceived as having occurred due to the biological mothers' absence.

Many of the foster mothers expressed their capabilities and the importance of their care by stating that they gave the children the best of themselves. When I asked Julia if she saw fostering as a type of job, she said no. Although she acknowledged that it of course helped her financially, she downplayed the economic reasons and emphasized the moral reasons for deciding to foster:

> I sensed (*sentía*) that there was much need in the children for love and, and care. And always trying however we could to give them our best. Well, I say our because we are many women who cared for children and I imagine that all of us did it in the same way, you know. At least I did it with lots of love and with, and, and I did it from the heart, giving them the best.

Like Olga and Irma, Julia expressed a sense of obligation to provide the children with the special care and love they not only needed, but deserved. Julia's use of the word *sentía* (I sensed or I felt) to describe how she knew the children needed love suggests an instinctual or experiential awareness (felt) as well as a raised consciousness (sensed). Having become aware of the children's need for love, Julia felt a responsibility to fulfill this need by striving to "always" give them her "best." Providing these children the love they deserved, according to Irma, was what "you should do" because, in Olga's words, their future "was going to depend on" it. Julia, and, as she imagined, all other foster mothers gave their best to the children; this best included love and came from the heart.

By misrecognizing the biological mothers' poverty as bad affective care and by describing their own care for the children as not only good but their best, the foster mothers were able to view their care work as an integral part of the betterment of the children's lives. Although most of the foster mothers needed the income that fostering provided and despite an implicit understanding in their narratives—at times made explicit—that they were unable to give the children the best material things or economic opportunities, the foster mothers did not appear to misrecognize their own socioeconomic situation—somewhere between that of the biological and

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the adoptive families—as a mere "good" capacity to provide affective care. Instead, they stressed

that they were able to give the children the best they had to offer emotionally: care and maternal

love.

The Uncertainty of Adoptive Parents' Better Best

In their discussions with me, the foster mothers generally regarded the adoptive parents

favorably. They expressed gratitude for the adoptive parents and described them as good, loving,

and often as the best option for the children. Even though the foster mothers told me they had

given their best to the children, they often described the adoptive parents' love for the children in

terms of better, suggesting the adoptive parents provided a "better best" than the foster mothers.

For example, Doris stated, "I believe that she has an incredible life opportunity. Her parents

adore her and I believe that it is the best for her." María also described the adoptive parents' love

for the child she had fostered in terms of better:

> I thank God, well, that David is finally with people that love him. And, and I feel a bit
> satisfied because, look, I saw how the parents are. And, yes, I saw that they loved him
> and everything. And they gave him lots of love. The mom, well, how tenderly she hugged
> him. But I say, well, better this way than had he stayed with the [biological] mom,
> because, well, perhaps she didn't love him.

Although María referred to both the biological and adoptive mothers as "moms," she put into

question the biological mother's love for the child, while stating as fact the adoptive mother's

love for the child, as something that she herself had witnessed during their visit. María's

devaluation of the biological mother's relationship with the child bolstered her positive valuation

of the adoptive parents' relationship with the child. By negating the biological mother's love for

her child, María could continue to believe that the child would have been the worst off

emotionally with the biological mother and was the best off emotionally with the adoptive

parents.

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In such comparisons of the biological and adoptive mothers, the foster mothers made themselves invisible. In describing the adoptive parents' love as best, they minimized the significance of their own feelings. Yet, both Doris and María, with tears in their eyes, told me how much they loved the children they fostered and how much they missed them. During the interviews, the foster mothers both emphasized and minimized their love for the children. Also, while their evaluations of the adoptive parents as best for the children reflects the generally positive view they held about them, at other times during the interviews the foster mothers expressed uncertainty about the adoptive parents' love for the children and were judgmental toward them. What do these inconsistencies tell us about the foster mothers' opinions toward the adoptive parents as well as their understandings about their own liminal care work?

The uncertainty the foster mothers expressed regarding the adoptive parents' capacity to provide the best affective care for the children is closely linked in their narratives to the issue of limited contact between the foster and adoptive families. Although Doris and the adoptive parents of the girl she fostered eventually lost touch with one another, they had been friends prior to, during, and after the adoption process. Doris's belief that the adoptive parents would provide the girl "an incredible life opportunity" was based on substantial, direct knowledge about, and interaction with, them. However, the other nine women I interviewed were not prior acquaintances of, and had very little contact with, the adoptive parents. According to these women, some adoptive parents visited once or twice during the adoption process, but the foster mothers' contact with them during these visits was very limited. Post-entrega, some adoptive parents made no contact with the foster mothers at all and others kept in touch for a while but eventually stopped. Only a few adoptive parents continued to correspond with them by writing letters, sending emails, telephoning, or sending photographs. Two of the women mentioned that

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one of the families of the children they fostered still visits her during regular trips to Guatemala, but that these visits were the exception.

Although most of the women said they did not know why the adoptive parents did not maintain contact since they had received no explanation, the women speculated about what they thought had happened: the adoptive parents were sending correspondence, but the lawyers were not forwarding it to the foster mothers; the lawyers had advised the adoptive parents not to correspond with the foster mothers; the foster mother had moved so the adoptive parents could not find her; the adoptive parents were too busy with work and family; or the adoptive parents had no interest in Guatemala or did not want the children to know their origins. Although several foster mothers did express the possibility that the adoptive parents simply did not desire to maintain contact, most of the women imagined reasons that gave the adoptive parents the benefit of the doubt by placing blame on the lawyers, on themselves, or on circumstances.

Given the limited interaction between the foster mothers and adoptive parents, the foster mothers generally did not have much direct knowledge of the adoptive parents' capacities to provide affective care or of the quality of the children's lives in the United States. Their opinions about the adoptive parents, then, must have been based mostly on preconceived notions and stereotypes about the "good life" in the US. Their justification statements about the adoptive parents' motives for limiting contact with them support this assumption and suggest a reproduction of the unequal power represented by each type of parent. The adoptive parents— those with the power to decide whether to sustain contact—must have had a good, justified reason for not remaining in touch with the foster mothers.

Yet, the foster mothers were also judgmental of, and hurt by, the adoptive parents' decisions to never begin or to sever contact. For example, when the adoptive parents did not stay

in touch, Zulma and many of the other foster mothers said they felt hurt and sad because they

missed the children and, in the absence of any contact, worried about their well-being. Regarding

one of the boys she cared for, Zulma said:

> I never heard about this child again. Never. Never, never. And it hurt me so much
> because, believe me, he was such a wonderful, handsome boy. But I never heard from
> them…that worried me because, I say, how must they be treating him? Worse if they
> treat him badly? Oh, no. I have thought about all of this, I don't know, I don't know. I
> hope to God it's not so. I hope to God it's not so. The truth is I don't know. I don't know
> how they treat him, you know, once they're with him. I never had the chance to go to the
> United States to see a family. I don't know.

Zulma's hurt feelings appear to stem from an underlying belief that the adoptive parents should

have kept in touch with her, should have accepted her love for the child, and should have

acknowledged the importance of her care work. Instead, by "never" contacting her, the adoptive

parents rendered her and her care work invisible. Zulma's repetition of the word *never* suggests

that, in addition to being hurt, she was also angered by this imposed invisibility. Although the

temporary nature of the foster mothers' care work was an essential part of the transnational

adoption process that the women accepted, the erasure of and disregard for their caring feelings

and concern toward the children was not a necessary part of the process. From the perspective of

the foster mother, the adoptive parents had unnecessarily inflicted pain on her by failing to

acknowledge the importance of her care work. Implicit in Zulma's uncertainty is a negative

judgment about the adoptive parent. How could she be certain that such people would have the

capacity to truly care for the children when they had not been able or willing to appreciate her

love for these same children?

Several of the foster mothers were also concerned about what they viewed as the adoptive

parents' general lack of knowledge or interest in Guatemalan history, culture, or languages,

especially Spanish. Eliza explained to me that the adoptive parent "has to understand the history,

the culture, a bit of language, so that the children learn about this. But the majority came to

adopt, stayed in hotels, took the children, and didn't see anything more of Guatemala. They don't

even know what we eat. Nothing. And that is sad because [the children] are Guatemalan by

birth." For Eliza, a parent having deeper knowledge about her child's place of origin, or perhaps

more important, an interest in this knowledge, was critical for the child.[17] Similar to the hurt

Zulma expressed over the adoptive parents' failure to acknowledge the importance of her love

and care work, Eliza expressed sadness over the adoptive parents' apparent disinterest in

Guatemalan culture. Eliza appeared to equate the adoptive parents' seeming lack of interest in

Guatemala as a lack of interest in who the children were at their core, something that she and the

other foster mothers intimately understood as Guatemalans.

According to Zulma, some adoptive parents did appreciate the importance of maintaining

a connection to Guatemala, but others did not even want the children to know they were from

Guatemala. Zulma explained:

> I learned that some adoptive parents didn't want to know anything about us afterward,
> because they didn't want the children to realize, to find out that they were Guatemalans
> or, I don't know what happened. But some children, yes, some parents did identify with
> us very well and said that, yes, they wanted to have contact with the foster mother. For
> the children, you know.

Although Zulma admitted she really did not know the reason why some adoptive parents did not

maintain contact, she was concerned that they did not want the children to realize they were

Guatemalans. In her comment, Zulma implicitly depicted foster mothers as representatives of

Guatemala's history, culture, and love. She contrasted these adoptive parents—the ones who

failed to acknowledge not only the importance of her care work but also of her Guatemalan-

ness—to the ones who understood the importance of staying in contact with the foster mothers

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[17] Although anthropologists generally do not believe much in the idea of birth identity as such, they are interested in how those involved with transnational adoption—parents, agencies, writers of popular adoption literature—understand children's identities within the context of two conflicting stories: one of the child as a tabula rasa and the other of the child rooted in ethnic background (Telfer 2003; Yngvesson 2004).

for the children's well-being. Many of the women I interviewed seemed to believe that the children's lives with the adoptive parents in the United States were much better than they would have been in Guatemala, but that, for many children, these better lives came at the expense of being cut off from their cultural origins. While most foster mothers seemed to think this "better" outweighed the negative effects of such a sacrifice, they also viewed the sacrifice as unnecessary, as they would have gladly helped maintain the connection had they been given the opportunity, or had the power, to do so.

The foster mothers' uncertainty toward the adoptive parents' capacity to provide the best affective care to the children is most salient when they discussed what they "hoped" the children's lives were like in the US. For example, Eliza, immediately following a statement about the undeniable socioeconomic superiority of the United States, said, "I hope (*Ojalá*) the majority are really loved and live in close-knit families. Certainly some aren't, but the majority. But, that's okay. They went to a better country. They are going to have opportunities that they'd never have here." While Eliza was certain of the socioeconomic advantages of the United States, she was unsure about the level of affective care. The Spanish word *ojalá* connotes both hope and uncertainty. The uncertainty of hope lies in the ambiguity of what is being hoped for. From the perspective of the hoper—which is limited by gaps in her knowledge about the validity of that for which she hopes—the "hoped for" is ambiguous because it may either be true, false, or partially true and false.

One possible explanation for Eliza's uncertainty is that the gap in her knowledge pertains to whether or not a higher socioeconomic status equates to a greater capacity to love, suggesting a hint of recognition that this may not be so. Eliza wanted to be certain about the adoptive parents' love for the children, but could not quite be so. Yet, despite this uncertainty, she

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ultimately hoped that the majority of the children were loved and attempted to minimize her

uneasiness by stressing that the children would have better opportunities in the US. In doing so,

she gave priority to a future filled with better socioeconomic opportunities—that which she

could assure herself was true—over a future filled with love—that which she could only hope

was true. Another possible explanation for her uncertainty is more personal: an awareness that

the gap in her knowledge is the direct result of the adoptive parents' failure (or inability) to

maintain contact with her, a void they could have easily filled at will had they been given the

choice to do so. *Ojalá* in this context is also a criticism of the adoptive parents' erasure of her

from their lives.

The women's ambivalence toward the adoptive parents reflects their own liminality as

foster mothers. While talking with me about their experiences of when the children were still

living with them in Guatemala (pre-entrega), the foster mothers expressed that they knew the

children better than anyone else did at that time and that they had given the children their best.

When referring to the time after the children left (post-entrega), the women described the

adoptive parents as a better best. In so doing, the foster mothers prioritized the adoptive parents'

capacity to care for the children and minimized their own, thus acknowledging the temporary

nature of their care work. The women understood and acknowledged that their foster care work

involved becoming invisible, but the love they gave and still felt for the children also made this

difficult to accept. Although during the interviews the women both minimized and emphasized

the importance of the love they provided the children, this did not reflect an ambivalence toward

the children; they were clear that they loved the children deeply. Given that they understood their

love for the children as permanent, the women were hurt and angered when others—especially

the adoptive parents—disregarded this love and made it invisible. The ambivalence they

expressed toward the adoptive parents, whose existence made clear the liminality of the foster mothers' care work, reflects the ambivalence the women felt toward their position as temporary care workers.

(Mis)recognizing and Making Sense of Lesser Best

The foster mothers' use of *better* and *best* to evaluate and compare the biological mothers' and the adoptive parents' capacities to provide socioeconomic and affective care to the children reflects the ways in which they both misrecognized and acknowledged socioeconomic inequalities in an attempt to make sense of their own liminal position as temporary care workers. Despite their limited contact with the biological mothers and the adoptive parents, the foster mothers had formed opinions about these others: they tended to negatively describe the biological mothers as greedy and devoid of sentiment and to positively describe the adoptive parents as loving and capable of providing the best for the children. Throughout the interviews, the foster mothers made evaluative statements about the biological mothers' and adoptive parents' capacities to provide affective care to the children without reference to the underlying socioeconomic and power inequalities. In so doing, they misrecognized socioeconomic status as one's level of capacity to provide adequate affective care. In other words, they misrecognized the biological mothers' economic poverty as affective poverty—an inferior capacity or inability to love—and the adoptive parents' relative economic wealth as affective wealth—a superior capacity to love.

While this overarching misrecognition on the part of the foster mothers reproduced the underlying power structures that created such socioeconomic divisions in the first place, and while it furthermore may have served to exploit the foster mothers' labor (discussed in chapters 5 and 6), it may have also allowed the women to feel good about, and make sense of, their own

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temporary, intermediary child care work. By evaluating each type of parent as progressively better, the foster mothers were able to maintain their beliefs that they were an integral part of the betterment of the children's socioeconomic and emotional lives and that the adoption system of which they were a part was good. As Olga explained, "[there is a] satisfaction that you have when you turn them over to better hands. Because if you go on thinking that you are the best for them, then you have to, to think that they are going to be better off with their adoptive parents, that they are going to be much better. To make it a little easier." By believing that the adoptive parents were "better hands," Olga and the other foster mothers could feel satisfaction in having directly assisted in improving the lives of the children they fostered. This belief and the resulting satisfaction she described also eased her pain and sadness over the children's departure from her home. All the women I interviewed expressed sadness over the children leaving. In response to my question about her family's relationship with the children who stayed with them, Irma stated, "ah, [we were] happy, happy, we adored them, yes. And afterwards, we all remained sad, but that is how it has to be. They have to have a better future. Yes." The overarching misrecognition in the foster mothers' narratives of the biological mothers' economic poverty and the adoptive parents' relative economic wealth as inferior and superior love, respectively—believing that the children were in a better place—seems to have helped the women feel that their affective labor, and their and their families' suffering, had not been in vain.

As previously noted, in their comparisons of the biological mothers' and adoptive parents' capacities to provide affective care, the foster mothers made invisible or minimized their own feelings for the children. Since the foster mothers were generally better off economically than the biological mothers but worse off economically than the adoptive parents, misrecognizing their own socioeconomic situation as their capacity to provide affective care

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would mean that they were more capable than the biological mothers, but less capable than the adoptive parents. In other words, their best would be a lesser best. Yet, when they discussed their own care of the children, the women expressed pride and confidence in their abilities, described how much they loved the children, and emphasized that they gave the children their best. They did not, as the betterment narrative would suggest, misrecognize their own intermediary socioeconomic status as a merely "good" capacity to love. Instead, throughout their interviews with me, the foster mothers seemed to either acknowledge the larger socioeconomic context or to misrecognize it as affective capacity in particular ways that helped them make sense of and positively value their liminal positions as temporary care workers who continued to feel love for the children.

For example, in the foster mothers' narratives regarding their own capacities to provide affective care for the children in relation to the biological mothers' capacities, misrecognition of the biological mothers' socioeconomic poverty as an inability to love served to bolster the foster mothers' evaluation of their own care. Although the foster mothers occasionally acknowledged and were sympathetic toward the biological mothers' economic hardship and suggested that the Guatemalan government and nation were at least partly to blame for their inability to provide for their children, the foster mothers were often critical of the biological mothers' decision to relinquish their children. The sadness and anger the foster mothers expressed regarding the biological mothers' decisions seems to have stemmed from their belief that biological ties "should" include emotional ties and that breaking those ties "should" hurt. From the perspective of the foster mothers, then, the biological mothers had not met their affective obligations as parents. In contrast, the foster mothers explained that they had done what one "should" do for these children, namely fill the emotional void left by the biological mothers by loving the

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children and providing their best. By ultimately misrecognizing the societal, socioeconomic problems underlying the biological mothers' decisions to relinquish their children as personal character flaws—as evidence of moral and affective poverty—the foster mothers were able to contrast their own willingness and capabilities with the biological mothers' incapability and unwillingness to provide maternal love. In so doing, they erased the love these women may have felt for their children and emphasized how the biological mothers were less like mothers than themselves.

In describing their own capacities to provide affective care for the children in relation to the adoptive parents' capacities, however, the misrecognition of socioeconomic as affective capacity through the use of the betterment narrative did not always mesh with their evaluations of themselves. On the one hand, misrecognizing the adoptive parents' wealth as affective superiority allowed the foster mothers to view the children's lives as progressively improving as they moved from biological to foster to adoptive parents. On the other hand, viewing the adoptive parents' love as "best" was incongruent with the foster mothers' own feelings and experiences. The foster mothers expressed that they had given their best, not their second best. Also, the women appeared to have difficulty reconciling the idea of the superiority of the adoptive parents' love with the ways the adoptive parents ultimately treated the foster mothers. Although the foster mothers were generally positive toward the adoptive parents, they nevertheless expressed uncertainty about their capacity to provide the children the best love. The women expressed sadness about and anger toward the adoptive parents' failure to do what the foster mothers thought they "should" do for the well-being of the children: keep in touch with the foster mothers and acknowledge the importance of the love they gave the children as well as their cultural knowledge of the children's place of birth. In contrast, the foster mothers depicted

themselves as willing and able to fulfill such a role in the children's lives, had they had the power to make that decision.

In summary, the ambivalence the foster mothers expressed toward their relation to the biological and adoptive parents reflects the ambiguity of their position as temporary care workers. The foster mothers generally chose to misrecognize the socioeconomic status of both the biological mothers and the adoptive parents as their (in)capacities to love, thus erasing any love the biological mothers may have felt for their children and assuming the superiority of the adoptive parents' love. Expressed though the narrative of betterment, this misrecognition allowed the foster mothers to view their care work as an integral part of improving the children's lives, which in turn eased the sadness and pain they felt over the children's absence. However, the erasure or reduction of their own love for the children—whether through the betterment narrative or the actions of the adoptive parents—was harder for the women to reconcile. While the foster mothers understood that their care of the children was temporary and that part of their care work included their eventual disappearance from the children's lives, the permanence of the love they felt toward the children made it difficult to accept the imposed invisibility of their love. It also made it difficult for them to believe that their invisibility was best for the children.

CHAPTER 5

THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER: THE SUBJECTIVITY OF THE OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS

OF PAID FOSTER CARE WORK

Paid care work involves both affective and economic relationships with others. In the previous two chapters, I intentionally focused on the foster mothers' understandings of their affective relationships with the children under their care and their perceived relation to the biological mothers and the adoptive parents in affective terms. In chapter three, I found that, despite the ambiguity of the foster mothers' status as mothers, the women did not express ambivalence with respect to their feelings for the children under their care; they were clear that they cared for them deeply. Instead, the seeming contradictions in their narratives—that their relationship was at once kin-like and non-kin and both temporary and permanent—stemmed from underlying dominant cultural understandings that view care and family as distinct from work and market, and reflected the bothness required of their liminal position as temporary care workers. In chapter four, I analyzed how the foster mothers attempted to make sense of their liminal position by comparing their own, the biological mothers', and the adoptive parents' capacities to provide affective care to the children. I found that the foster mothers both misrecognized and acknowledged socioeconomic inequalities in ways that helped them feel good about their own liminal position as temporary care workers. The ambivalence they expressed toward their perceived relation to the biological mothers and adoptive parents reflects the ambiguity of their position as temporary care workers. In these two chapters, I touched only lightly on the economic aspects of fostering work.

In the current chapter, I address fostering as a type of paid care work. The first half of the chapter deals with the women's subjective understandings about their foster care work. I analyze the justificatory ways in which the foster mothers talked about the economic aspects of their

work in relation to the affective aspects of it. In the first section, I argue that the women expressed ambivalence toward their paid care work, owing to what seemed to them an incongruity between economy and family. I expand on this argument in section two, suggesting that the women attempted to mitigate their unease by prioritizing their affective reasons over the economic incentives for fostering. Yet, in doing do, they reproduced taken-for-granted assumptions, or doxa, regarding money and love that were the underlying cause of this unease toward their paid care work.

The second half of the chapter examines how the subjective understandings regarding economy and family served to reproduce the objective conditions of foster care work and informed the women's assessment of the fairness of such conditions. In section three, I lay out the objective conditions of foster care work, such as how the women obtained their jobs, who employed them, and how much they were paid. Then, in section four, I discuss the reasons several foster mothers gave for why they viewed their pay as fair: fostering provided regular pay in a context of relative job scarcity, working at home was convenient, and the work did not feel like a job. I argue that the women's subjective understandings about their paid foster care work, informed by doxa regarding work and mothering, naturalized the exploitative "objective" conditions of their work, thus reproducing gender inequalities and limiting their work options.

<u>The Uneasy Truth of Fostering as Paid Work</u>

In this section and the section that follows, I examine the women's subjective understandings about fostering as paid care work. The women I interviewed described fostering as both an economic and affective opportunity. When I asked them why they had decided to care for children awaiting adoption, their immediate responses to my question varied. Three of the women said they had needed the work to financially support their households, and three other

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women responded that they had begun fostering because they liked children and wanted to help them or the adoptive parents. The remaining four women stated both reasons: they were in need of money and they wanted to help others. Regardless of their immediate response to my question, all of the women, except Doris, mentioned both economic and affective reasons for fostering throughout the interviews. Yet, when speaking about the economic incentives for fostering, they often did so in ways that subtly justified or minimized the economic, and prioritized the affective, motives for fostering. In this section, I analyze the ways in which the women spoke "honestly" about their paid care work to understand their apparent unease when speaking about the economic incentives of fostering children. In the next section, I examine the ways in which the women attempted to mitigate this unease.

Although some of the women directly stated the economic reasons for fostering, their directness had a confessional quality about it. The frequency with which the women used phrases like *honestly* or *the truth is* to preface their answers struck me as I transcribed the interviews. For example, Eliza said, "I had the opportunity to take care of children who were waiting for their parents to come get them." When I asked her why she had decided to take the opportunity, she answered, "for two reasons. Honestly, the first one was to help with my household's expenses. And the second one was to be close to the children who were not with their biological parents and could not yet be with their adoptive parents." As part of the conventions of conversation, participants generally expect each other to be genuine and to tell the truth (Grice 1975:46–47). They do not need to explicitly state that what they are saying is truthful in order for listens to understand it as such. According to Derek Edwards and Alessandra Fasulo, what they call "honesty phrases"—such as *honestly* or *to tell the truth*—express "the speakers' internal states— their genuine understanding, knowledge, thoughts, judgments, or opinions"—about what they are

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saying (2006:371). The inclusion of honesty phrases suggests that speakers mean to convey something other than, or in addition to, the truthfulness of what they are reporting. The foster mothers' use of honesty phrases to preface their statements about the economic motives for fostering, then, should tell us something about their understandings of their care work.

In their analysis of various types of question-and-answer conversations, Edwards and Fasulo found that speakers used honesty phrases to assert the sincerity of the objective, factual information being reported as well as their subjective knowledge state or motivation for reporting it (2006:348). They also found that speakers often used honesty phrases to preface problematic responses, that is, when speakers believed the askers of the question were expecting a more functional or normative response than the one being offered (2006:371–372). In other words, people do not generally speak "honestly" about things they expect will be accepted without reservation or judgment. Given the speakers' perceptions that the listeners may not be receptive to their responses, the use of honesty phrases is confessional as it conveys the speakers' reluctance to say what they are saying (2006:348, 370). Honesty phrases, then, serve to set the record straight both by enforcing that what the speakers are expressing is what they understand to be true and by correcting "the question asker's assumptions or presuppositions" (2006:369).

Although Edwards' and Fasulo's analysis of honesty phrases is based on examples of conversations in which the reasons for the problematic nature of responses were straightforward—for example, when the speaker was saying something unpleasant about a third party or admitting to not having completed a task, they lay the groundwork for applying the concept of "honesty phrases" to conversational examples in which the problematic nature of responses is less obvious. My conversations with the foster mothers provide such examples. The problematic nature of the foster mothers' responses to my questions regarding their motivations

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for fostering is not immediately obvious. I had not asked the women a question that suggested I preferred a particular response over others. For example, had I asked the question, "Did you begin fostering because you like children?," they may have believed, understandably so, that I expected them to reply in the affirmative and thus may have spoken "honestly" if their response was negative.

However, that was not the case. Instead, I had asked them an open-ended, neutrally-framed question, that is, "Why did you decide to care for children awaiting adoption?" Why is it, then, that many of the women included honesty phrases in their responses? Expanding on Edwards' and Fasulo's analysis, I suggest that people may speak "honestly" about claims that put into question, even if ever so slightly, the taken-for-granted aspects, or doxa, of the topic at hand. In other words, the speakers perceive, even if unconsciously, that the listener may find what they are claiming difficult or surprising to hear because it goes against the grain of underlying cultural assumptions. In the case of the foster mothers, their perceptions about what constituted an acceptable answer to my questions seemed to be grounded in doxa regarding family and economy.

Returning to Eliza's quote at the beginning of this section, her inclusion of the word *honestly* to preface that her motivation for beginning to foster was economic emphasized to me her sincerity and candor. Yet, the degree of reluctance implicit in the use of honesty phrases also suggests that Eliza was uneasy about the economic reasons for her decision to foster. This unease points to underlying doxa concerning family and economy or, more specifically, mothering and paid work. As noted, cultural ideals regarding family and work in Latin America have historically construed paid work and unpaid care as opposing binaries in which "work" is the paid, rational, skilled, cultural activity of men in the public sphere, and "care" is the unpaid,

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emotional, unskilled, natural activity of women in the private sphere (Cancian 2000:138; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000:160). Within this framework, men are the primary economic providers of the household and their fulfillment is understood to derive from their paid care work outside the home. In contrast, women are the primary providers of emotional support and care, and their fulfillment is expected to derive from their unpaid mothering and housework (Stølen 1996:176; García and de Oliveira 1997:368; Chant 2003:167). Women's paid work, then, is expected to be strictly for monetary compensation to better fulfill their roles as mothers and wives and not directly for personal fulfillment. Performing the work of mothering for economic gain, then, goes against accepted understandings of mothering, in which affective reasons should be primary, and the economic and affective should not intertwine.

While the dominant ideal that paid work was only for men and that women were best suited to care in the home has never reflected the everyday reality of most families in Guatemala (Smith 1995:736), many middle-class Ladinos—like Eliza and the other foster mothers I interviewed—accept much of the gendered ideology of the upper class, even when their lived experiences contradict the ideal (Smith 1995:736). By acknowledging the importance or necessity of receiving compensation for what the foster mothers viewed as a type of mothering, and by hinting at the interrelatedness of economic and affective care, these women risked being judged by others, who could use this to devalue or negate the women's love and concern for the children, or to condemn them morally. In such a context, Eliza may have felt the need to speak "honestly" to me because she assumed that, as a white woman from the United States, I would be surprised or judgmental about her prioritizing money, or giving it equal billing, in this situation. She may have also spoken "honestly" in reaction to public opinion about fostering—often

viewed negatively as part of the baby market[18]—or because she was admitting to something that others may have chosen to obscure or be untruthful about, to the fact that she fostered children to earn money. In this context, speaking "honestly" signaled the women's unease and ambivalence toward their liminal position of fostering, a type of work they seemed to view as paid mothering work.

The Reproduction and Reduction of Ambivalence

In an attempt to come to terms with the liminality of their paid care work and to reduce their unease over receiving money for their foster care work, most of the foster mothers I interviewed minimized the monetary incentive and highlighted the affective aspects of fostering, at times in combination with honesty phrases. Although Zulma was less direct about the economic reasons for fostering, like Eliza she prefaced her answer to my question regarding the reasons she began fostering with an honesty phrase, *the truth is*. Zulma said:

> The truth is that I have always liked children. And I saw that there was the opportunity, economically, since they also paid us. And I saw the children's need. They needed lots of love. And it wasn't so much for the money, but rather because, to me personally, I really like children. Also, I believed I had enough patience and sympathy.

She acknowledged that she received payment for caring for the children and hinted at the importance of this income for her household. Yet unlike Eliza, Zulma emphasized her emotional capacity to help the children over the economic reasons for doing so. Her use of an honesty phrase expressed her unease about the economic aspects of her work, and she seemed to attempt to assuage the impact of her statement to reduce this unease. She stated that her reason for fostering "was not *so much* for the money." By adding the words *so much*, she minimized the importance of money in her decision to foster while also acknowledging that money was, at least in a small way, part of the reason for her decision, a point to which I will later return.

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[18] Issues regarding market and corruptions will be raised in chapter 6.

In addition, she preceded and followed her comment about the economic opportunity fostering provided with comments about how much she liked children. Corina did this as well. When I asked Corina if she would foster children again if the opportunity arose, she said yes "because it is a way to help children," for which she is capable, and because "I would like it. It's, it's a job, you know, and you're always looking for forms of employment. Yes, I love children." Although Corina acknowledged the need for money, she hastened to minimize the monetary incentive and highlighted the affective rewards. Like Zulma and Corina, most of the women prioritized their affective over economic reasons for fostering, even when they clearly understood fostering as paid employment.

Later in my interviews with the foster mothers, I directly asked each of them if they saw fostering as a type of job. Given Doris's unusual circumstances—that she had fostered for a friend and not through an agency or lawyer—she was the only woman to respond with a blunt and unwavering "no." All of the other women's answers were more nuanced and reflected their ambivalence toward their paid care work. The women often followed their acknowledgement about fostering being a type of job with the conjunction *but*, thus contrasting what was previously stated to what follows. For example, half of the women began their answers to this question with "yes," but then explained that fostering was also different than other jobs and also not exactly like a job because the children were like family. Eliza said, "yes, honestly, yes," then she continued, "but not the same, not the same because it is a job in which you become emotionally attached…as if they were (como si fueran) your sons and daughters." She "honestly" acknowledged that fostering was a job, because it was by any definition: she was employed by someone else to complete a task for which she was paid. But she also saw it as a special kind of job, one that required love and a familial bond with the children. Sara similarly commented that

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"yes, it is a job. It's a job that we carry out with lots of love and with much reverence. It's a job because they, they pay us, you know. They give us money. But, uh, it's a, uh, it's like something, uh, it's as if they were (como que fueran) our sons and daughters."

In her research on day care providers, Nelson (1990:213) found that, although the women tended to align their care of the children with mothering, their descriptions were "suffused with literal *buts*," such as "I love these children but they're not mine." She concluded that the day care providers' use of *but* suggested an unease both about loving children who were not their own and about making this activity into paid work. Although I did not find the foster mothers I interviewed to be uneasy about loving the children under their care, and although the examples of *but* from these two different groups of women qualify different things—the day care workers were qualifying their relationships with the children and the foster mothers were qualifying the job, the use of *but* in both groups expresses unease over performing child care work for money and the unease stems from the underlying putative dichotomy between money and love.

The foster mothers' use of *but* acknowledged a tension between what a job is supposed to be for these women—fulfillment of purely economic need—and what this special type of job required of them—the fulfillment of the emotional needs of another, which was also gratifying for the women. For these women, what made the job of fostering different from other jobs was that the workers—the foster mothers—fell in love with the "subjects" of their work—the children, who were like sons and daughters to them. The previous discussion in chapter three on how foster mothers were like mothers and yet only "like" mothers to the children under their care is relevant here. Through their use of the phrase *como si fueran nuestros hijos* (as if they were our children even though they were not), the women expressed both an emotional closeness to and an emotional distance from the children under their care. Their love for the children was

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framed as permanent, as "unconditional," but their status as mothers was impermanent, conditional on their employment. As seen in Eliza's and Sara's remarks above, several of the women also used this phrase when explaining how fostering was a job even though it did not feel like a job. Fostering did not feel like a job because the women felt like mothers to these children, but they felt only "like" mothers to these children, in part, because fostering was a job. The fact of their employment put conditions on their status as mothers, but the "unconditional" love they felt toward the children, in turn, conditioned how they conceptualized fostering in terms of work. Fostering, as Eliza put it, was "a personal kind of work" that required the development of intimate relationships with the children.

As previously mentioned, when I asked the women whether they saw fostering as a job, half of them began their answers with "yes," then explained that fostering was different from other jobs. The other half began their answers with "no," but then went on to qualify that response and explain that indeed fostering was a job. Julia responded, "no, no, I never saw it as, as a job even though, yes, yes, it helped us, you know, care for the children, but I never did it for the money but because, uh, I felt that the children needed lots of love and, and care." Although fostering did provide her family with economic support, she did not view fostering as a job; she did it for the children. I then asked her how fostering was like a job and also not like one. Julia found it difficult to explain this: "Yes, it is a job but you don't see it, you don't do it as a job because, because we don't, we don't take it like that. Like, how do I say it? Like I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that, like it's a way of, ay, I don't know, a job but with, no, I don't know how to explain it." When asked directly, Julia could not explain how fostering was different from other jobs, but felt strongly that it was different, perhaps because she had lived the experience as a relationship with the children, not as a job. In other parts of the interview, however, she filled

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in more clearly what she meant when she said that fostering did not feel the same as other kinds

of paid work, namely, that she got to work with newborns and that was "very beautiful" and said

that the facilitators provide them this opportunity as work, but that the foster mothers never quite

see it that way.

To better understand what was for these women distinctive about fostering as compared

to other jobs, I asked those who had worked in other types of child care if fostering was different

from that work and, if so, how. Juliza viewed fostering and other child care work as similar

because both demanded that the women understand that the children were not theirs, but they fell

in love with them anyway; she also understood that this bond was valuable in this work. She was

sad when the children she fostered left and was also sad when the private orphanage in which she

worked was closed. They were similar to her because they were both a type of work that did not

feel like work.

However, most of the other women described fostering and other child care work as

different. For Corina, fostering was different from working in day care. With fostering, the

children are with you all day, every day, and you care for them when they are sick, even in the

middle of the night, for which you receive the same pay regardless of the specific demands of the

situation. She also was "caring for her, as if she were a daughter, you know." In contrast, in day

care, she watched the children for only part of the day, not on weekends, and was paid per day or

per number of hours worked. Fostering was different from other kinds of child care because it

required more work, but also more intimacy and affection, and was even more special than other

child care. Zulma also responded that fostering was different from other child care work:

> Many caregivers go to take care of children directly because of the salary, but do not
> identify fully as foster mothers. However, when you care for children in your home, yes it
> is different, because, yes, you identify fully with them, as a mother to her sons and

daughters. It is very [with emphasis] different. It is completely different. It's no longer for a salary but because they really become integrated into your family.

For Zulma, fostering even differed from other types of child care work because the monetary compensation was viewed as secondary, and because the women were like mothers to the children under their care; the children became temporarily integrated as family members.

What all the responses had in common—whether the women expressed that fostering was a job that was not, or that it was not a job that was—was the coming together of money and love, and the difficulty in explicating and coming to terms with this seeming anomaly.[19] Although the women identified fostering as both paid employment and a familial-like relationship with the children, a tension between the affective and economic aspects of foster care work remained prevalent throughout the interviews. For example, Olga responded that fostering was a job "in part." It was a job because she received a salary, "but more than a job, uh, I felt like I was helping to, to care for them and, and to give them the love, well, that those children lacked." What made the job more than a job was the love they felt for and gave to the children. The pay they received to care for these children conflicted with the affection they felt for them. Also, love is described here as something outside the realm of employment.

Fostering as a gratifying, special kind of work conflicted with the women's understanding of paid work as solely for compensation, not personal fulfillment. The women acknowledged that they were paid, and that their relationships with the children were temporary, but they also felt that the children were like their sons and daughters, and that this attitude should have been how the foster mothers approached their work. Irma summed up nicely the likely progression of the women's changing views toward fostering as a type of work: "Ah, well, it

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[19] In her research on family child care providers, Tuominen also found that the women often had difficulty expressing the coexistence of the affective aspects of their work with the pay they receive (2000:118).

starts out as a job but then later it's like you're a real mother." It starts out as a job, but becomes something different, a kind of kin relationship with the child.

Although an emotional bond with the children was an integral part of paid foster care work, the women seemed to be struggling with the contradiction between their experiences of the coexistence of economic compensation and emotional, familial-like bonds and prior notions about the incompatibility of such coexistence. Unable to deny that fostering was paid employment and unwilling to deny the existence of their emotional ties with the children, the women had difficulty reconciling the affective aspects of their job with the economic ones. In a cultural context that makes distinctions between economy and affect, paid foster care work can be understood as a liminal position that brings the connection between the economic and the affective to the fore. Yet, even though the existence of the women's liminal foster care work put into question the putative dichotomy between money and love, their narratives often enforced and reproduced this dichotomy. Rather than acknowledging and defending the coexistence of love and money as unproblematic for them, they framed their narratives in subtle ways—with the use of honesty phrases, by qualifying statements with *but*, and by surrounding comments about economic compensation with comments focusing on affective reasons—that obscured the liminality of their position. Although the women reproduced the cultural assumptions that defined their work as liminal and that were the underlying cause of their ambivalence toward their work, the women also seemed to rely on these same cultural assumptions to feel good about their work. Paradoxically, they used doxa—the underlying cause of their ambivalence and unease—to attempt to reduce this unease.

<u>The Objective Conditions of Foster Care Work</u>
<u>as Paid Employment</u>

Despite the foster mothers' ambivalence toward their paid care work, they clearly

understood that fostering was paid employment. In this section, I describe the objective

conditions of foster care work that defined the work as undeniably a job for these women: their

previous work experience, how they obtained their jobs, who their employers were, their

qualifications, and how much pay they received. Similar to other jobs they had held, the women

were paid by employers in exchange for their services. Nine of the ten women I interviewed

began fostering at least in part because they needed the work to help support their families, and

most of them had some prior work experience. One woman had worked in a restaurant, another

had worked in the quality control unit of a clothing factory, and a third had been a seamstress.

Six of the ten women had worked in child-related fields: two had been teachers, one had worked

in an organization that helped adolescents, three had worked as nannies or day care providers,

and two had been caregivers in private orphanages. Although not paid work, two of the women

had been fulltime housewives, and all the women ran their households in addition to other work

they may have had.

When I asked the women how they began fostering children awaiting adoption, six of the

women said that friends, neighbors, or acquaintances who had themselves fostered children

recommended them to the lawyer or agency for whom they worked. Three other women were

approached by facilitators who had heard of them through word of mouth from people related to

their previous child care employment. Although certainly some relationships between and among

foster mothers developed as a result of fostering, the relationships mentioned by the women I

interviewed preceded their fostering work. For example, Irma, Olga, and Julia were neighbors of

the same colonia and had helped each other obtain fostering positions, and Zulma referred her

friend Juliza to the lawyer for whom she worked. In addition, three of the women mentioned that their sisters, mothers, or aunts had also fostered children. These previous relationships help to explain the existence of cradle communities, neighborhoods with large concentrations of foster homes.[20] Some of the women, such as María, did not appear to have close relationships with other foster mothers. Doris was the only one who began fostering because the adoptive parents were friends of hers living in the United States, and she offered to care for the child they were trying to adopt. Of the ten women, she was the only one who did not work for a lawyer or agency; she was unique in not seeing fostering as a job in any respect and did not view the money she received as compensation for her care work. For these reasons, I do not include her in the following discussion about the women's perceptions regarding paid employment.

All of the women I interviewed except Doris said they were hired and paid by either *abogados* or *licenciados* (lawyers), *encargadas* (facilitators), or *agencias* (agencies), although one woman reported that the adoptive parents started paying her directly when their facilitator left Guatemala unexpectedly. The foster mothers' accounts of the general structure of employers coincided with news reports of the adoption system (San Martin 2007; Smith-Sparks 2007). As described by these women, the agency referred to the larger organization that coordinated the adoption process and communicated with the adoptive parents. The facilitators were women hired by adoption agencies, and occasionally by lawyers, to supervise the foster mothers.[21] Some lawyers worked on behalf of agencies and dealt solely with the legal procedures and formalities of the process, while other lawyers worked independently, coordinating the Guatemalan side of the adoption process, communicating with adoptive parents, and overseeing the foster mothers,

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[20] Cradle communities are discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

[21] The foster mothers consistently used the feminine *encargada* and not the masculine *encargado* each time they referred to a facilitator. None of them referred to facilitators in the plural.

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although occasionally they too hired facilitators for this purpose. The majority of the lawyers involved were men.[22] The apparent gendered division between female facilitators and mostly male lawyers is representative of persistent dominant cultural understandings in Guatemala regarding "appropriate" types of work. While women of all classes are entering the labor force in greater numbers, and while women are slowly going into fields historically understood as "men's work" (i.e., politics and law), few men choose to enter into what historically has been understood as "women's work" (i.e., child care) (Chant 2003:183).

Although the men in foster families—husband and sons—helped out and formed relationships with the children, they were not the ones hired to foster. Women—more specifically, women who were mothers—were the ones hired and paid to perform the work of fostering. As previously mentioned, all the women were raising or had raised biological children. They believed that their status as mothers was the main reason their employers hired them. When I asked Zulma if the lawyers had given her requirements on how to care for the children, she said, "look, the majority of the lawyers only knew that you were a mom, that's all they wanted, that you were a mom." The women believed that the lawyers knew the women were qualified for foster care work because their experiences as mothers had prepared them for this type of work, in other words, that the lawyers valued the women's motherhood.

The foster mothers reported receiving monthly salaries between 500 and 2000 quetzales (US$62–US$250) per child in the 2000s, wages consistent with those reported by ILPEC (2000:24). Most of the foster mothers mentioned that they were only allowed to foster two children at a time, but one of them said she had fostered up to five at a time. Seven women said

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[22] The foster mothers' use of the plural form of the words *abogados* and *licenciados*, which can mean either all male lawyers or a combination of male and female, rendered impossible the calculation of an accurate percentage of male and female lawyers. However, the foster mothers' use of the singular form of "lawyer" was masculine 80% of the time, and only two of the women referred to the feminine form.

they had no other employment while fostering children, one said she continued working as a part-time nanny, and another said she continued providing day care services in her home. Several foster mothers mentioned that they were not allowed to work other jobs while fostering because their employers expected them to dedicate all their time to caring for the children, but the two women who continued other employment said the lawyer and agency allowed them to do so as long as they could perform both jobs simultaneously.

The Misrecognition of the Objective and the Subjective

The foster mothers clearly recognized that fostering was paid employment that had both positive and negative aspects. The women derived satisfaction from caring for children and helping adoptive families, but they also acknowledged the exploitative ways they were treated by employers, a topic to which I will return in chapter 6. Yet, when I asked the women if they thought the wages they received were fair, half of them answered yes.[23] The two main reasons the women gave for why they believed their pay was fair were 1) that any regularly paid employment in a context of relative scarcity was good and 2) that the work did not feel like a job. In this concluding section, I examine the example of the women's assessment of their wages as fair to demonstrate how their subjective understandings about foster care work served to frame and reproduce the seemingly objective conditions of the work. I suggest that the contradictions in the women's narratives regarding their wages—that they received fair wages for work that was, at least to an extent, exploitative and that they received wages for work that did not seem like work—indicate the misrecognition of mothering as "natural" and "not work." This misrecognition naturalized the "objective" conditions of their work, which limited their actual

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[23] The other half of the women responded "no." I will address the reasons they felt their pay was unfair in chapter 6.

employment opportunities, "justified" low wages for paid mothering work, and framed the women's understanding of their pay as fair.

One of the reasons the women gave for why they thought their pay was fair was that any employment that provided a consistent monthly salary in a context of relative scarcity was good. For example, Corina viewed her salary as fair because, in Guatemala, any job that pays monthly "is good, you know. You're looking for any kind of job. And, and it was fair, in line with others." The wages the women reported to me do appear to be in line with other urban wages. Using the median salary per child of 1200 quetzales (US$150), a woman fostering two children would have earned 2400 quetzales per month (UD$300), slightly above the average monthly urban wage for nonagricultural work for women in 2006, 1650 quetzales (US$215). Despite the fact that men, on average, earned more than women for urban nonagricultural work, with an average monthly wage of 2115 quetzales (US$276), Corina and other women still described their pay as just, perhaps in part because they fared better than rural women, whose average monthly salaries were only half of those of urban women (Ñopo and Gonzales 2008:7–8).

Corina and others determined the fairness of the job not by the level of difficulty of the labor or by the amount of compensation per hours worked, but by the provision of consistent pay in a context of general employment scarcity. The women's post-fostering experiences reflect this scarcity of work. At the time of the interviews, 18 months after adoptions had officially closed between Guatemala and the United States, Sara was the only woman still fostering, but since the agency stopped paying her, she had begun cleaning houses to make ends meet. One woman still ran a day care in her home; another could not find permanent work so she was washing clothes whenever she could; two had recently lost their jobs when the private orphanage they worked for closed; and five others were not working, only two of whom were not seeking employment. In

other words, seven of the ten women wanted or needed to work, but could not find sufficient employment, suggesting that women who had fostered had difficulty finding replacement jobs as adoptions between Guatemala and the United States came to an end. Given the context, the women's comments regarding the fairness of their wages suggest they were being realistic about the actual conditions of the job market; jobs were, in fact, scarce. However, women's opportunities within the seemingly objective job market were limited by underlying subjective ideas (doxa) regarding gender and work.

The convenience of working at home is another factor that defined for these women the fairness of their wages. The women's understanding of foster care work as convenient provides an example of how doxa regarding gender and work both limited women's actual job opportunities and framed their subjective understandings about the fairness of the pay they received. Although several of the women stated that their compensation was not fair, they lessened the degree of unfairness by explaining that the work was convenient. As Julia summarized, "[the pay] wasn't fair but, but it gave us the opportunity to earn money staying here at home." That women often decide to accept low-wage, informal employment that provides them the flexibility to do paid work alongside their unpaid child care and other domestic responsibilities is well-established in feminist scholarship regarding gender and work (Mitter 1994). The flexibility of working at home, however, is countered by the exploitative conditions of the work, such as low wages, the around-the-clock intensity of the work, and, quite often, its association with "the clandestine economy" (Mitter 1994:27, 96).[24] Despite the exploitative aspects of the work, some of the foster mothers assessed their wages as fairer than they may have

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[24] Foster care work in Guatemala was also linked to the clandestine economy, an issue I address in chapter 6.

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otherwise done because the work was convenient for these women who had children to raise, households to manage, and limited sources of additional income.

However, the assessment of paid work done at home as "convenient" for women is based on historical cultural understandings of the gendered division of work, in which women have been primarily responsible for unpaid housework and child care in the "private" sphere while men have been expected to work outside the home for pay in the "public" sphere (Uttal and Tuominen 1999). Some scholars have found the putative division between public and private to be largely irrelevant to the experiences of paid child care workers (Abel and Nelson 1990:5). I agree that the dichotomy of public and private may seem irrelevant to the experiences of some paid care workers; for example, women do not discontinue paid care work just because it is located within the "private" space of the home. However, in the case of the foster mothers I interviewed, the putative dichotomy of public and private, as well as the related dichotomy of economy and family, continue to be relevant to their experiences. As part of doxa regarding work, these dichotomies serve to shape the "objective" conditions of the work.

For example, in Guatemala, gendered ideals continue to shape understandings and practices regarding work and family. Although the share of urban women who work for an income is on the rise, women tend to work in low-paying, traditionally "female" occupations such as clerical workers, vendors, domestic workers, teachers, and child care providers (International Food Policy Research Institute 2003). Of these occupations, child care workers receive the lowest wages, most likely because child care work is the activity most associated with "unskilled women's work" and provides a flexible schedule for women, who continue to be primarily responsible for unpaid child care and housework (Hallman et al. 2002:17). Gendered doxa regarding work, then, reinforces and perpetuates unequal economic work conditions by

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justifying as fair low wages for "women's work" (Stølen 1996:160). In the case of Guatemalan foster mothers, the women viewed their wages as fair because the work was convenient; the work was convenient because the women were the ones primarily responsible for managing their household; and they continued to be the ones primarily responsible for managing their households because of persistent doxa regarding the gendered division of work.

The other reason the women gave for why they believed their wages were fair—that fostering did not feel like a job to them—provides another example of how doxa regarding gendered work, specifically mothering in this case, framed the women's views regarding the fairness of their wages and reproduced the "objective" conditions of their work. When I asked Irma if she thought her wages had been fair, she stated, "well, at that time, yes. Yes, and since we, by the end you don't even see it as a job." As she came to understand fostering as something other than work, she appears to have downplayed the relevance of the fairness of the pay, perhaps because she was being paid for something for which a woman did not normally get paid, namely, mothering. The underlying cultural and social understandings about mothering—as part of women's natural ability and thus not "work" requiring monetary compensation—served to justify their low pay and kept their wages (artificially) low (e.g., see Uttal and Tuominen 1999:764).

The Matter of (Mis)recognition

In summary, the existence of the women's foster care work and their experiences fostering put into question the related, putative dichotomies of public and private, of economy and family, of work and mothering, and of money and love. Rather than defending their paid foster mothering work as unproblematic, in the first half of the chapter, I found that the foster mothers were ambivalent and ill at ease toward their liminal paid care work owing to what

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seemed to them an incongruity between economy and family. I suggested that the women attempted to mitigate their unease by framing their narratives in justificatory ways that obscured the liminality of their position and reproduced such dichotomies. They minimized the economic incentives and prioritized the affective motives for fostering by speaking "honestly," qualifying their statements with the conjunction *but*, and surrounding comments about economic compensation with comments focusing on affective reasons. In so doing, they reproduced doxa that defined their work as liminal and that was the underlying cause of their ambivalence and unease. Yet, they also seemed to rely on these same assumptions to feel good about their work. In other words, they used doxa, the cause of their unease, to attempt to reduce this unease.

In the second half of the chapter, I demonstrated how subjective doxa regarding economy and family, specifically work and mothering, naturalized the "objective" conditions of foster care work, thus reproducing gender inequalities and exploitative conditions. I argued that the women misrecognized the subjective (doxa regarding gendered work) as objective (job scarcity and low wages) and assessed their low wages as fairer than they may have otherwise done. In addition, although the women, as well as their employers and the adoptive parents, understood the value of their affective bonds with their charges and understood affection as a vital part of their care work, they simultaneously devalued the economic, market value of the affective aspects of this care work by associating the work with mothering. The misrecognition of the objective—the work involved in mothering—as subjective—as "natural" and, thus, not "work"—reproduced doxa regarding gendered work.

The misrecognition of mothering as natural, combined with the foster mothers' emphasis on the affective aspects over the economic incentives of their work, served to frame fostering as something outside the realm of compensated work, thus reducing the women's own expectations

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regarding compensation. However, while most of the women expressed unease over receiving

economic compensation for work they understood to be a type of mothering, not all women

viewed their wages as fair. By focusing on misrecognition in this chapter, I do not mean to

suggest that the foster mothers were uncritical of their work conditions or unaware of illicit

activities surrounding the transnational adoption process in which they worked. The next chapter

addresses these issues, focusing on the women's recognition of the exploitative aspects of their

foster care work and the questionable activities of their employers.

CHAPTER 6

"IT'S A LIFE WE'RE TALKING ABOUT": THE FULFILLING

AND ALIENATING WORK OF PAID FOSTER CARE

Private sector foster care, as a job and as a temporary kin-like relationship, was an important aspect of the former adoption system in Guatemala and, as such, was also a component of the adoption market and its corresponding corruption. By emphasizing in the previous three chapters the satisfaction the foster mothers felt for the job, their closeness with the children, and their misrecognition of underlying doxa, I am not suggesting that the women were uncritical of the conditions of their work or that they were naïve about illicit activities associated with the adoption system. Quite the opposite was true. The foster mothers I interviewed were aware that the adoption system in Guatemala functioned like a market in many ways and were forthcoming about aspects of the adoption process they understood to be questionable or illicit.

Seven of the ten women made direct statements about questionable or illicit aspects of the adoption process, and two others did so indirectly, for example, by stressing the legality of their custody of the children under their care. Only one of the women made no references to her awareness of wrongdoing with respect to the transnational adoption system, but, in general, she was the most reserved and provided the fewest details about her experience. Toward the end of our interview when I asked Eliza if she would like to add anything, she summed up nicely what many of the other women also expressed: "That people understand that not everything about adoptions was clear (*blanco*). That there were many dark things." Eliza and the other women believed that the children adopted to the United States most likely have loving homes, but they also understood that questionable and illegal practices made at least some of these adoptions possible.

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The foster mothers' knowledge about the problems surrounding the adoption process

came from their own experiences, communication and contact with other foster mothers, hearsay

and rumors from the community, and news reports. During our conversations, the women made

reference to many of these problems, including kidnapping, the buying and selling of babies, the

use of jaladores (brokers) to coerce biological mothers into relinquishing their children, the lack

of governmental regulation of the adoption process and the government's failure to provide

sufficient social services, the falsification of documentation such as birth certificates and DNA

tests, and the misappropriation of adoption fees. From the women's perspective, economic

motivation was at the core of many of these questionable activities. In fact, the money generated

by adoptions in Guatemala was striking, becoming the third or fourth source of international

exchange for Guatemala with revenues estimated as high as US$200 million per year (López et

al. 2006). In sum, transnational adoption functioned like a market in many ways,[25] and the foster

mothers worked within this system. The women were integral to the transnational adoption

system in that their care work kept the children alive and healthy during the process. Yet, foster

mothers received only meager wages for providing this service.

In this chapter, I address the women's awareness of and resistance to the market aspects

of transnational adoption in Guatemala by examining their narratives regarding the issues of the

exploitation of their care work and the (mis)treatment of children within the framework of

commodification. While the application of commodification to children has been accused of

being reductive (Taylor 2004) and its application to care work has been criticized for tending

solely to the harmful aspects of care work (England 2005), the application of materialist

concepts—such as exploitation, commodification, and alienation of labor—does not preclude

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[25] Chapter 2 provides a more detailed overview of the problems associated with transnational adoption between the United States and Guatemala.

one from exploring the positive dimensions of care work as well as the coexistence of the positive and negative aspects (see Bubeck 1995). On the contrary, ignoring how transnational adoption mirrored and became part of other markets—and how parts of the process mirrored commodification—threatens to tend solely to the positive aspects of adoption and care work and, as such, would be a disservice to the care workers. I have chosen to analyze the foster mothers' remarks about their employers (mis)treatment of them and the children within the framework of commodification because I believe it provides insight into the women's own understandings of the exploitative aspects of their fostering.

The first half of the chapter addresses the foster mothers' recognition of the ways in which the adoption system functioned like a type of market. In the first section, I lay out the aspects of foster care work that most clearly marked fostering as undeniably a job for these women, namely, their employers' exploitative treatment of them, including unfair wages, distrust and unreasonable expectations, intentional deceptiveness, and exploitation of their affection for the children. In the second section, I use the framework of commodification to analyze the women's remarks about their employers' treatment of the children. I focus on the issue of employers' control of communication as an example of how they obscured the misappropriation of adoption fees, followed by the issue of employers' payments to biological mothers as an example of the commodification of children, and ending with the issue of employers' refusals to pay for certain material and medical resources as an example of their attempt to reduce costs and increase profits.

The second half of the chapter deals with the ways in which the foster mothers also resisted their exploitation and the commodification of the children, refusing to treat adoption as a market. In the third section, I address the women's resistance to the commodification of children

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through their resistance to the commodification of their own affective labor. I begin with an analysis of foster care work within the framework of commodification, followed by an analysis of the management of the foster mothers' emotions as a form of alienation of labor. I then return to the discussion of employers' regulations regarding children's sleeping arrangements as an example of the management of emotion, then to the discussion of the day the children left (the entrega) as an example of the alienation of the women's affective labor. I conclude the chapter with an explanation of how the commodification of women's labor interrelates with the commodification of children and, as a result, how the women's resistance to the alienation of their affective labor is also resistance to the commodification of children. I contend that the women expressed both an understanding of the commodification of their care work and of the children—an awareness that the adoption system functioned as a type of (at times illicit) market—and a refusal to accept the alienability of their affective love and, thus, a refusal to treat children as commodities.

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Recognizing the Exploitative Aspects
of Foster Care Work

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In chapter five, I discussed the objective conditions of foster care work that made the work undeniably a job for the women, the most salient of which was the wage they received for their work. Some of the foster mothers saw these wages as fair. Their evaluation of the fairness of their wages appeared to be a function of their focusing on the caring aspects of the work— how the work was fulfilling and like mothering—and situating their employment within the context of a limited job market—how any job was better than none at all. In this section, I focus on the aspect of fostering children that most clearly marked the work as undeniably a job for these women, specifically, their employers' exploitative treatment of them. In contrast to evaluations of the work as fair, the women who evaluated parts of their job as unfair focused on

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the "work" aspect of their care—the intensity and conditions of the work—and situated their employment in the context of other jobs in the adoption system, namely, those of their employers and adoption agencies. According to the women, the exploitative aspects of their care work included unfair wages, employers' distrust and unreasonable expectations, employers' intentional deceptiveness, and employers' exploitation of their affection for the children.

One aspect of their care work that the women described as unfair was the salary they received from their employers. The main reason the women gave for why they thought their pay was unfair was the incommensurability of the pay with respect to the intensity of the work of caring for small children. As Eliza explained, "we received very little money for a job that's 24 hours a day." The women not only worked 24 hours a day, they worked seven days a week. In other words, they worked 720 hours a month for a median monthly salary of US$150, an hourly rate of less than 21 cents. By focusing on the all-consuming nature of foster care work, Eliza and others stressed the extent to which their modest pay came nowhere close to reflecting the work they performed.[26] The women believed that one of the reasons their employers paid them such low wages was because they knew the women would, out of necessity, agree to the low pay. As Sara explained, the pay was unfair because "the majority of foster mothers need their salary, you know, to earn money. We didn't even earn minimum wage." In Guatemala, the legal minimum monthly wage for non-agricultural work in 2006 was US$208, so the foster mothers' median monthly salary of US$150 per child was well below minimum wage. While caring for two children at once would have put some of the women's monthly salaries over the national

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[26] The question of how to value unpaid household labor, particularly mothering, has been raised by many scholars (e.g., Crittenden 2001; Folbre 2001; Fraser 2002; Benería 2003). While I agree this is important and related work, my focus here is on women who already receive payment for their parenting work. I am also concerned less about what a fair, appropriate wage may look like for this parenting work and more concerned about these women's understandings of (un)fairness regarding the work they performed within the particular context of transnational adoption in Guatemala.

minimum, this does not necessarily mean their wages were adequate or fair since the national minimum wage has been found to be insufficient to meet the basic needs of a family, even when two parents work (US Department of State 2006). Although some of the women understood their wages to be fair because they viewed any work in a job market of relative scarcity as good, Sara, Eliza, and others acknowledged that their employers took advantage of the women's economic need to pay them lower wages and exploit their labor.

Several of the women emphasized the degree to which they viewed their wages as unfair by comparing their pay to what their employers and agencies earned. For example, as Eliza angrily explained, "materially [the pay] wasn't sufficient for all the work caring for a child entails. But after finding out how much the parents paid the lawyer or agency for each adoption, my salary was nothing. Because, really, the huge payments that the parents made to the agencies stayed at the agencies or with the lawyers." In Eliza's remark, foster mothers' pay was doubly unjust: the lawyers and agencies insufficiently compensated the foster mothers with "very little" money, even though they received "huge" payments from the adoptive parents. Zulma echoed Eliza when she remarked that the lawyers "were those who were getting rich. Because we earned very little per month." Both women expressed an awareness that their low wages were not a result of a lack of funds but instead a result of employers' decisions to pay low wages.

Although adoption agencies' and lawyers' fees appear to have varied widely, the gap between foster mothers' wages and adoption agencies' fees was undeniably large. Adoptive parents on average paid roughly US$25,000 total per adoption (Centro de Estudios de Guatemala 1995:16; Lacey 2006; Casa Alianza et al. 2007:22). Basing the foster mothers' total compensation per adoption on a median salary of US$150 per month for an average of eight months (ILPEC 2000:24), foster mothers would have received roughly US$1200 per adoption, a

mere 4.8 percent of the total adoption fee. Although lawyers self-reportedly charged an average legal fee of US$1825 per adoption (ILPEC 2000:25), the difference of US$625 in the compensation per adoption between employer and employee, while in itself significant, is artificially low. Many lawyers served multiple functions in the adoption process and often managed the allocation of the adoption fees, so they most likely brought in much more per adoption than their self-reported legal fees suggest. These data support the women's comments regarding the large discrepancy between their wages and what their employers and agencies earned.

The women's remarks also suggest that they tended to place the blame for their low wages on their employers rather than on the prospective adoptive parents. To Eliza's and Zulma's minds, the prospective adoptive parents provided sufficient money to the agencies and lawyers, but their employers chose to exploit the women out of their own greed. In the case of child care center workers in the United States, Uttal and Tuominen (1999) found that the addition of a third party to the structure of employee-employer relations in paid care work obscured the exploitative conditions of the work from the parents. Like child care center employees, foster mothers in Guatemala were not hired directly by parents but through third parties, either adoption agency facilitators or lawyers. The indirect participation of prospective adoptive parents served to obscure from the parents any exploitation the foster mothers may have endured. However, the indirect participation of the prospective adoptive parents also seemed to have allowed the foster mothers to ignore the implicit participation of the parents in the exploitation of their labor and to focus instead solely on the culpability of those directly responsible for paying them, namely, their employers. In the women's comments about both the incommensurability of their pay with respect to the intensity of the work and the discrepancy between their pay and

what their employers earned, the women ultimately attributed the exploitative conditions of their work to their employers' greed.

A second aspect of foster care work toward which the women expressed dissatisfaction was their employers' supervision and expectations of their care of the children. The women reported varying degrees of overall supervision by their employers, ranging from almost none at all to monthly or bi-monthly surprise visits to, in Irma's words, "constant control." The women generally viewed no supervision as bad, as a sign that their employers did not care about the children, and generally viewed the existence of some supervision as good, as a sign that their employers were concerned about the children's well-being. However, the women felt that certain types of employer intervention were unfair. Such intervention included "constant" supervision as well as misguided and unreasonable expectations. The women tended to view too much supervision as a sign that their employers did not trust them. For example, Olga viewed the agencies' oversight as excessive and, thus, problematic because, in her opinion, it demonstrated that the employers "were mistrusting." That sense of distrust, in turn, made her worry about doing everything correctly. As Olga explained, "[I was] fearful, well, of not measuring up" to employers' expectations. She seemed fearful about being judged by someone who did not trust her. Although she expressed confidence in her abilities to care for children throughout the interview, her employer's seeming distrust of her—which in her mind was unjustified—was a source of anxiety.

The foster mothers were also critical of employer expectations they believed to be misguided and unreasonable. For example, most of the women explained that their employers held them accountable for the children's general health and safety. While the women agreed the children's health and safety were important and accepted the responsibility of ensuring their care,

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three of the women disagreed with the degree of vigilance they believed their employers expected of them. Olga, who had worked for three agencies, recalled that "some of them, well, uh, really demand the highest level of precision from you," which she later described as unnecessarily demanding. According to Olga, the different agencies required the same basic plan of care, but some expected a higher level of care and vigilance than others, which at times was at odds with what the women believed was appropriate. For example, María expressed unease over what she believed were her employer's unrealistic expectations regarding the safety of the child under her care. María explained that, when her biological children started to crawl, they occasionally bumped into things and that that is just the way it is, "what can you do?" However, caring for the child she fostered was different: "He could bump into nothing, nothing, nothing. And I ran around after him, but when he began to crawl and walk, ay!" In this case, María believed she was being asked to prevent the inevitable—the occasional bump as one learns to crawl and walk—requiring her to become vigilant to an extent that María had learned through previous experience to be unnecessary. As discussed in chapter five, some of the women assessed their wages as fairer than they may have otherwise done because of the flexibility of working at home. Yet, María's and Olga's comments suggest that such convenience may have been countered by the intensity of the work, in part due to what the women viewed as the unrealistic expectations of their employers.

The women's memories of their unease over their employers' supervision and expectations they viewed as unfair and extreme most likely reflected their concerns and fears of losing their jobs if they failed to meet such expectations. However, I suggest that the foster mothers' unease over their employers' expectations they viewed as unrealistic also arose from perceived contradictory messages the women received from their employers regarding their

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mothering skills. From the women's narratives, the employers seemed at once to value and devalue their mothering. As the foster mothers understood the situation, their employers hired them in large part because they valued their mothering experience, in other words, because they had raised or were raising biological children. Yet, once hired, their employers told them how to care for the children and supervised their performance, suggesting at least to some of the women that their employers did not fully trust the quality of their mothering skills. Since the foster mothers were hired by their employers on behalf of the prospective adoptive parents, the distrust the foster mothers perceived in their employers most likely stemmed from employers giving priority to their clients' expectations about child care—or, at least, their own assumptions about what those expectations might be—over their employees' understandings about childrearing.

Given their diverse class and cultural backgrounds as well as personal preferences, the fact that the various people involved in the adoption process had different expectations about how to raise children is not surprising. While an in-depth exploration of these differences is beyond the scope of the current project, I provide a loose sketch to highlight the complexity of the situation. Within Guatemala, foster mothers' generally middle class understandings about appropriate ways to raise children differed from lawyers' or agency facilitators' generally upper-class understandings of the same process. Both of these understandings likely differed from prospective adoptive parents' middle- to upper-middle class understandings of childrearing in the United States. Employers' assumptions about parents' childrearing preferences in the United States complicate matters further. During the interviews, the foster mothers mentioned several differences between how they cared for their biological children and how they were expected to care for the children under their care, including what to feed the children (formula instead of milk, pancakes instead of tortillas), how to protect babies from the elements (lightly clothing

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them so they could get some fresh air instead of tightly swaddling them in blankets), and where the children should sleep (apart from adults instead of with adults).

The issue of where children should sleep was the most prevalent topic in the women's narratives regarding their care of the children. In chapter three, I explained in depth the debate between sleep training—having children sleep apart from parents—and cosleeping—having children share a bed or a room with parents. When raising their biological children, some of the foster mothers used sleep training, others used cosleeping, and others used a combination of the two methods. With the children for whom they fostered, however, the women specifically were told to use the sleep training method and not to practice cosleeping. Although many parents in the United States have strong feelings regarding the sleep debate, studies have found that, in practice, they often use a combination of methods (Ramos and Youngclarke 2006). Despite this diversity among prospective adoptive parents, employers appear to have assumed a preference for sleep training and then required foster mothers to use this method as a way to prepare children for their adoptive parents. Yet, employers' privileging of what they assumed to be the prospective adoptive parents' preferred style of parenting (sleep training) over that of the foster mothers (mixture of cosleeping and sleep training) also interfered with the foster mothers' care of the children and devalued their mothering work.

A third aspect of their work that the women deemed unfair was their employers' intentional deception that trapped them in exploitative working conditions. Several of the women described their employers as reliable when the children were first placed with the women, but that they then changed once the children were well-established in their homes. As Olga explained:

> At first, well, when you start working with the agency, everything is wonderful, you know, for two, three months, and from there, well, the agency becomes distant, you

know. And you already know that you have to go to the doctor, you already have your identification, everything. Um, that's when they start falling behind on the payments, and the foster mother, well, you have to figure out what you're going to do with the children.

According to Olga, once she had custody of the children and was legally responsible for their care, her employers often became less attentive. She later stated that this deception demonstrated her employer's "irresponsibility." While a few of the women said their employers paid them regularly, many of the women's employers paid them late, inconsistently or, in Sara's case, stopped paying her altogether. Such employers took advantage of the women's legal obligation to care for the children. Olga's remark also suggests that the foster mothers' employers took advantage of the women's relative isolation at home to further exploit their labor.

In addition to their findings that a third party employee-employer structure obscured the exploitative conditions of child care center employees, Uttal and Tuominen (1999:767) found that the private home location of family day care providers contributed to the potential for exploitation. In the case of foster mothers in Guatemala, the private location of their care work does appear to have made them more vulnerable to exploitation. Foster care work was both home-based child care and involved a third party in employer-employee relations. The potential for exploitation of foster mothers, then, may have been twofold: the private location of their care work made them more vulnerable to exploitation and the indirect participation of prospective adoptive parents allowed the parents to remain ignorant of such exploitation.

The foster mothers also deemed unfair their employers' exploitation of the women's concern and affection for the children. In addition to irregularly paying the women, employers failed to provide sufficient non-monetary resources. According to the women I interviewed, their employers provided them with milk, baby formula, and diapers, and covered some medical expenses for the children under their care. However, a few of the women mentioned that the amount of formula and diapers the employers provided was insufficient, so the women had to

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supplement their allotment by purchasing more, the money for which came out of their salaries. The employers also generally did not provide them with food, clothes, or shoes for the children. Scholars have found that women generally use a much larger percentage of their wages on household and child care expenses than men do in Latin America (Chant 2003:222). In the particular case of the foster mothers, however, the women's salaries were used not only to cover regular household expenses but also to provide for the needs of additional members of the household who were also the indirect sources of their salaries. Part of their salaries, then, went back into supporting the children. Once the children were established in the women's homes, their employers could exploit the women's concern for the children, both reducing their own expenses and further reducing the foster mothers' actual net wages for doing the work.

For example, Zulma complained that the lawyer for whom she worked provided a certain amount, and that amount "had to last, and if it didn't last, we took money out of our own pockets to buy milk and diapers." When she told the lawyer that the amount would be insufficient, Zulma said he responded, "that's your problem. You have to figure out what to do." The women's solutions for figuring out what to do to resolve the problem of an insufficient supply of diapers, formula, and the like was limited by their concern and legal obligation to the children under their care. Zulma and other foster mothers used their pay to purchase these items instead of letting the children go hungry, soiled, or dirty.

The women's employers took advantage of their affection for and legal obligation to the children, but they also exploited the women's moral obligation to the children. Kittay's theory of the vulnerability of dependency work provides a useful framework to understand why the women continued to foster children under such conditions. According to Kittay (1999), dependents, by definition, are helpless and rely on those who care for them. Because of this

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necessary dependency and vulnerability, care work carries a heavy moral obligation that requires the care worker to be responsive to the dependent's needs. In turn, the care worker becomes vulnerable to the dependent's needs. This vulnerability limits the worker's options. Care workers also often are dependent on the "provider" of economic resources, making them vulnerable to exploitation. In the case of foster mothers, their employers, the providers of economic resources, were able to exploit the women's vulnerability because the women felt a moral obligation to provide for the children under their care. The obligation they felt limited the possibility of solutions to resolving their exploitation. If the women were unhappy with their pay, unlike other jobs, they could not stop doing the work without harming the children, and they did not want to harm the children because of their affective attachment to them.

Acknowledging the Commodification of Children in Transnational Adoption

The foster mothers' narratives regarding the unfair conditions of their work expressed more than an awareness of the exploitation of their care labor. As mentioned in the previous section, employers held the foster mothers accountable for the children's health and safety, and expected them to carefully monitor the children. Although the women viewed critically some of their employers' expectations and supervision as misguided, unreasonable, and exploitative, the women took the fact that their employers supervised the care the children received to indicate that they were invested in ensuring the children's general well-being. Yet, the women also depicted their employers as disinterested in the children and described their economic decisions as harmful to the children's health and well-being. In the women's narratives, any concern their employers may have had for the children was outweighed by what the women viewed as their purely economic motivation. While the women attributed the exploitative conditions of their work to their employers' greed, they described how this greed also harmed the children.

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Although the foster mothers did not speak specifically of commodities or products, most of them mentioned how some people in Guatemala treated adoption as a business, the employers for whom they worked being their prime example. Framing transnational adoption in terms of a type of business raises concerns about the commodification of children. While there is wide agreement that children should never be regarded as commodities (Taylor 2004), children may still be (mis)treated as things, as commodities (Strathern 1985). For this reason, applying the concept of commodification to the context of transnational adoption is useful for understanding the parts of the process that, intentionally or not, may have harmed children by mistreating them in ways that resemble the production of commodities.

I have chosen to analyze the women's remarks about their employers' treatment of the children within the framework of the commodification of children because this framework provides insight into the women's own understandings of their employers' decisions and expectations regarding the care of the children. For example, while the two aspects of the employers' treatment of the children—that their supervision of the foster mothers suggests their interest in ensuring the children were well cared for and that some of the economic decisions they made seemed to harm the children—appear to be at odds, the women did not describe employers' expectations of them and employers' economic decisions as contradictory. Instead, they seemed to believe that both actions stemmed from their employers' greed.

In this section, I first address the issue of the employers' control of communication as a way to obscure their misappropriation of adoption fees and the commodification of children. I then look at the issue of employers' payments to biological mothers as an example of the commodification of children. I end the section with the issue of employers' refusals to pay for new clothes and certain medical treatments as an example of their attempts to reduce costs and

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increase profits. I conclude that, by emphasizing their employers' greed as an economic

motivation paired with a lack of emotional concern for the children, the women reproduced the

dichotomy of economy and affect, which served to attribute the commodification of children

solely to those motivated by greed.

The women believed employers were able to successfully promote the children as healthy

and well cared for to the prospective adoptive parents while simultaneously misappropriating

adoption fees in ways potentially harmful to the children because they tightly controlled

communication between foster mothers and prospective adoptive parents. Employers, who often

served as intermediaries between foster mothers, prospective adoptive parents, and biological

mothers, did not generally allow much contact among them. According to the women I

interviewed, their employers in many cases actively prohibited such interaction, or, in Sara's

words, "they blocked communication." Some of the foster mothers speculated that their

employers restricted contact to conceal from prospective parents what was actually occurring.

For example, Zulma believed employers limited communication:

> to protect themselves, because we, us foster mothers, knew about everything…We knew
> everything. And that's why the lawyers didn't want us to communicate, because they
> refused. For example, if you had wanted to adopt a child, if you called, look at how many
> parents, families, asked for our help to tell them where their case stood, how it was
> progressing. The lawyers didn't allow it…We were prohibited from telling [adoptive
> parents] the truth.

According to Zulma, the foster mothers knew "everything" that was happening. This statement is

an acknowledgment that she and other foster mothers were aware of their employers'

impropriety. Zulma and other foster mothers imagined that employers imposed such restrictions

to protect themselves—and their businesses—from foster mothers' knowledge about their

misappropriation of the fees paid by the prospective adoptive parents. Eliza stated that employers

"didn't want the adoptive families to know how they were handling the money, that they were

doing it without regard for the children. Therefore, they maybe wanted to hide those parts, and that's why it was practically forbidden to start a friendship with [the adoptive families]."

Barbara Yngvesson (2004) has argued that the ways in which people talk about the exchange of money in transnational adoption obscures the issue of commodification. For example, agencies and lawyers charge fees, not prices, and adoptive parents purchase services, not babies. From the perspective of the foster mothers I interviewed, employers' control of communication, and thus information, also served to obscure, in a more intentional way, the misappropriation of fees and the commodification of children. By limiting and controlling the flow of information, employers could continue to assure the prospective adoptive parents of the health and well-being of the children while withholding certain economic and medical resources the foster mothers deemed necessary for their care.

Employers' payments to biological mothers were the most salient example of the foster mothers' awareness of the misappropriation of adoption fees and the commodification of children. Seven of the ten women mentioned explicitly that lawyers, intermediaries, and facilitators gave money to biological mothers or that biological mothers relinquished their children for money. Of the seven women, only María explicitly stated that she had witnessed a lawyer pay money to a biological mother during an appointment at the lawyer's office:

> I don't know how much they gave her, you know. But right in front of me they gave her a check, since the lawyer was there and the other guy too. They were talking. I didn't speak, I just saw it. And they gave her a check for thirty thousand. Imagine that, and they dropped her off at a bank…thirty thousand quetzals [approximately US$4,000]. And, people say they don't give more than fifteen thousand for a child. I don't know the details, you know. It left me frightened…that's what I don't understand about people, you know, that people want to have money more than they want to have their children.

María did not criticize the lawyer directly, but relayed her understanding of the interaction as inappropriate and wrong by expressing surprise and fear. As discussed in chapter 4, the foster mothers generally described the biological mothers as greedy and callous, as more economically

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motivated than emotionally concerned for their children. For example, Zulma explained that many biological mothers "looked at [adoption] as a business; they got pregnant and that was that." Sara echoed Zulma's sentiment when she stated, "what [the biological mothers] want is the money." I argued that such statements misrecognized the economic factors of poverty as personal character flaws, namely, as greed and a reduced capacity to provide affective care. I also argued that the women negatively evaluated the biological mothers to emphasize their own emotional closeness with the children under their care.

The women's evaluation of their employers paralleled in many ways their depiction of the biological mothers. They generally described their employers as purely economically motivated and devoid of emotion. In other words, the women evaluated those whom they saw as the direct participants in the economic exchange of children—the biological mothers as the sellers and the employers as the buyers—as greedy and unfeeling. Similar to their evaluation of the biological mothers, their evaluation of their employers as purely economically motivated ignored any emotional concern the employers may have had for the children and effectively reproduced the dichotomy of economy and affect, or money and love. Viewing money and love as incompatible in this particular context served to emphasize the employers' emotional distance from the children as well as to distance the foster mothers from the economic exchange of children. In the women's narratives, only those devoid of feeling could be capable of treating children as commodities and of treating adoption as a profit-making venture.

Another example of the women's awareness of the commodification of children was their employers' refusal to provide certain resources that the women deemed essential to the children's well-being. The issue of providing clothing for the children seemed especially important to these women as many of them mentioned that they kept the children clean and

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handsomely dressed. In contrast, they depicted their employers as indifferent to such things. According to Eliza, employers told them to go to *pacas* and, in the rare instance when the employer provided clothing, it was "*de pacas*" (used, second-hand). Pacas are stores that sell second-hand clothing that arrives in large packages (pacas) mostly from the United States. Although shopping at second-hand stores is common in the cities where these women lived, and at least some of the women likely shopped at them to provide clothing for themselves and their families, Eliza was critical of her employers' suggestion to buy second-hand clothing for the children she fostered. Given the foster mothers' awareness of the large sums of money their employers received from adoptive parents, the women seemed to equate their employers' refusals to buy new clothes with their treatment of the children themselves as "second-hand," as commodities to be packed up and sold to the United States. By purchasing second-hand clothing or refusing to provide clothing at all, employers also were able to reduce costs and increase profits.

The women were also highly critical of employers' refusals to cover certain medical costs. Some of the women believed their employers limited contact between foster mothers and prospective parents in an attempt to conceal children's medical conditions from prospective parents so as to avoid having to pay for specialized medical treatments. For example, Sara explained that foster mothers "know perfectly well how a child is. Many times [the lawyers] don't know [the children] and many times they don't let [the adoptive parents] find out what is happening on this end." Because the foster mothers spent infinitely more time with the children under their care than their employers did, they knew when the children needed medical attention. Yet, their employers often refused to pay to treat certain medical conditions. Zulma, who had fostered for over fifteen years, discussed the issue of the children's medical care at length.

According to Zulma, not only were her employers unwilling to pay any medical costs beyond the minimal expenses required of healthy, typically developing infants and young children, they also often withheld children's conditions—including Down syndrome, blindness, and deafness—from the adoptive parents.

One of the children Zulma fostered had nystagmus, involuntary rapid movement of the eye. When Zulma asked her employer to take the little girl to an ophthalmologist, she said the lawyer replied, "No, no, no. It's the parents who are in charge of that, not us." The lawyer told her that the adoptive parents were aware of the condition. However, when the adoptive parents came to Guatemala to pick up their daughter, Zulma discovered that they did not know about her condition when she saw their reaction to seeing their daughter's eyes:

> The mom cried and cried and cried, and hugged her. And she said that she didn't understand why they hadn't told her about this. And the lawyer said, 'look, here are your papers.' And he left. And I said, my God. How inhumane. How can he be like that? It's a life we're talking about. And the lawyers didn't pay for medical specialists.

In Zulma's retelling of this encounter, the lawyer is depicted as the only person with no emotional response to the child's condition. The adoptive mother wept, and Zulma seemed to feel empathy for her. She depicted the lawyer not just as expressing no emotion, but as being "inhumane." By stating that the child is "a life," she suggested that the lawyer was treating the child as an inanimate object, as a commodity.

This example clearly demonstrates how employers' greed could cause physical harm to the children that the adoption system purportedly helped. The concealment of medical conditions from the adoptive parents and the refusal to pay for medical treatments could be detrimental to the children's health and development. Zulma felt that, if the foster mothers had been allowed to communicate with the adoptive parents, in Zulma's words, "many children would have received treatment on time, and the parents from the US would have been very happy and satisfied.

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Instead, many left very angry." Zulma's example also demonstrates how the foster mothers evaluated their employers as callous and unfeeling in contrast to themselves and the prospective adoptive parents as emotionally concerned for the children. In so doing, the women reproduced the dichotomy of economy and affect, which served to emphasize the employers' emotional distance from the children and closeness to the economic exchange of children. Within the framework of commodification, the employers, from the women's perspective, attempted to increase the prospective adoptive parents' satisfaction with the care the children received, thus increasing the value of the children (treated as commodities) through control of their care (treated as product production). At the same time, employers attempted to minimize costs and increase profits by reducing the expenses associated with the children (production costs).

<u>Resisting the Commodification of Children through</u>
<u>the Inalienability of Affective Labor</u>

While the foster mothers acknowledged the (mis)treatement of children as commodities, they also strongly resisted it. In the previous section, I used the framework of commodification to analyze the foster mothers' remarks about their employers' treatment of the children to reflect the women's awareness that the transnational adoption process functioned in many ways like a market and treated children like commodities. In this section, I focus on how the women resisted the commodification of children through their resistance to the commodification of their own affective labor. I begin with an analysis of the foster mothers' care work in terms of commodification, followed by an analysis of the management of the foster mothers' emotions as a form of alienation of labor. I then bring back the discussion about employers' regulations regarding the children's sleeping arrangements as an example of the management of emotion, arguing that both the women's compliance with and defiance of this regulation represent the women's resistance to the management of the emotions they felt toward the children. I then

return to the discussion of the day the children left, the entrega, as the most salient example of the alienation of the women's affective labor, arguing that the women expressed both an understanding of the alienation of their affective labor and a refusal to accept the alienability of their love. I conclude the section with a discussion of how the commodification of the women's labor and the commodification of the children interrelate, and how the women's resistance to the management of their emotions and to the alienation of their labor was also a resistance to the commodification of children.

At the beginning of the chapter, I addressed how the women, by focusing on the "work" aspects of their care work, described their wages, employers' expectations, and the intensity of the work as exploitative and unfair. The exploitation of the women's work may also be understood in terms of commodification and alienation of labor. According to Marx, in working for wages, in selling their labor, workers produce not only the product, but also their labor and themselves, as commodities. Their labor becomes "congealed" in the product, an object "external" and "alien" to them (Marx 1988[1844]:71–72). Workers, then, become alienated from the products they produce and from their labor, now part of the products (Marx 1988[1844]:73). As congealed labor alien to the worker, the product produced may be either a physical object or a type of service performed. As Hochschild asserts, "if we can become alienated from goods in a goods-producing society, we can become alienated from services in a service-producing society" (1983:7). Alienated affective labor, then, can be understood as a commodity in the marketplace (Hochschild 1983:14).

The product of foster mothers' labor, then, can be understood as a service sold (indirectly) to the prospective adoptive parents, and foster mothers' labor, congealed in the service sold, can be understood as alienated labor. The type of service the foster mothers

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provided was caring for children awaiting adoption. As a type of care work, the women's fostering included both instrumental tasks, such as preparing formula and changing diapers, and affective relations, such as developing a significant degree of emotional attachment to the children (Abel and Nelson 1990:4; Kittay 1999:129–130). As paid care workers, foster mothers received wages from their employers in exchange for both aspects of their labor, thus becoming alienated from their instrumental labor and their affective labor. As previously discussed, employers managed foster mothers' care work by establishing expectations regarding the women's care of the children, such as expecting them to give the children formula instead of milk. In addition to overseeing the women's instrumental labor, employers managed their affective labor. For example, they expected the women to be affectionate toward the children without becoming too emotionally close.

In her research on service industry employees, Hochschild found that the management of affective labor required of employees by their employers—the management of emotion— alienates workers from an aspect of themselves—their emotions—"that is *used* to do the work" (1983:6). According to the foster mothers I interviewed, the employers attempted to manage the women's emotions. Given that the women performed their work at home, employers could not constantly supervise the women. Instead, they expected the women to manage their own emotions and instrumental activities in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the employers, the most prominent example being to show affection to the children, but not to become too emotionally attached to them. For example, when I asked Julia if there was any way to prepare herself for the day the child left, she said, "They always explained to us, there where the lawyer handled the procedures, uh, they explained to us that we had to, to know that [the children] weren't ours, that we were only caring for them temporarily. And that we shouldn't

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feel bad when they left." The employers expected the foster mothers to manage their feelings, to

use reason over emotion. In Julia's remark, the women were supposed "to know" that the

children were not theirs and were only with them temporarily, to remember that fostering was a

job. In turn, they also "shouldn't feel" bad when the children left, because them leaving is just a

part of the job. In other words, the foster mothers were expected to accept the alienation of their

affective labor.

María also spoke of her employer's advice regarding managing emotions. She said that

the facilitator told the women, "don't go having too much motherly affection [for the children]

because they leave." The facilitator tried to manage the emotions of her employees by telling

them not to emotionally care too much for the children. Yet, affective labor, namely, love, was a

large component of foster mothers' care work. Adoption agencies, lawyers, facilitators, and

prospective adoptive parents valued the foster mothers' love for the children, viewing it as

beneficial to children's health and development. However, the specific type of love many of the

foster mothers I interviewed felt toward the children—maternal love—appeared to be

problematic for the women's employers, at least, who attempted to manage the women's

emotions toward the children under their care. In the women's narratives, employers seem to

have valued the women's love for the children only insofar as it remained manageably temporary

and alienable.

As an example of employers' attempts to manage the emotions of foster mothers, I return

once again to the issue of children's sleeping arrangements. As discussed in chapter three,

employers seem to have imposed the sleep training method on foster mothers to enforce

emotional distance between children and foster mothers as a way to prepare the children for their

families in the United States. Sleep training in the foster home purportedly prepared the children

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by getting them accustomed to the routine of sleeping alone and by making the separation from the foster mother less emotionally difficult for the children. In the first section of the current chapter, I suggested that this regulation also privileged what the employers assumed to be the prospective adoptive parents' preferred parenting style (sleep training) over that of the foster mothers (cosleeping), thus devaluing the women's mothering. The employers' privileging of prospective adoptive parents' preferences may have also served to treat fostering as a service to prospective adoptive parents, rather than a maternal relationship between the foster mothers and children. In other words, such requirements attempted to regulate—to manage—the degree of maternal love the foster mothers felt toward the children under their care.

The foster mothers appeared to understand that the regulation on sleep training was one of the ways employers attempted to manage the women's love for the children. For example, Olga said the agency told her, "don't be with him too much, don't fall in love with him too much, um, it's that, uh, he has to sleep apart from you." According to the women I interviewed, the explicit reason the employers gave for the requirement to use the sleep training method was the children's best interests, that maintaining some emotional distance was best for the children. A few of the women disagreed with their employers' reasoning and chose not to follow the regulation on sleep training. For example, María told me she decided to let the child sleep in her bed because she believed that was what was best for him. She felt maintaining emotional distance was bad for the child because she believed he needed all the love she could give. By deciding to ignore the regulation and allow the child to sleep in her bed, María resisted her employer's attempt to manage her affective labor, namely, her love for the child.

Most of the women, however, said they followed the regulation and had the children sleep in a crib or bed, in a separate room from them whenever possible. The women who

complied with sleep training also did so because they believed it was best for the children, either because they had used this method with their biological children or because they believed employers' reasons for requiring sleep training. While the women's compliance with this regulation appears to be an example of the women's acceptance of employers' management of their emotions, I suggest an alternative interpretation. The foster mothers' compliance certainly suggests that the women managed the outward display of their emotions to their employers and, perhaps, to the children under their care. Yet, according to the women's accounts, their employers were trying to manage the women's internal feelings as well, to put a limit on the degree to which they fell in love with the children. Throughout the interviews, however, the women explained how difficult it was for them not to fall in love "too much" with the children. The women slept apart from the children out of concern and love for them, not as a work obligation or as a service to the prospective adoptive parents. They chose to comply with the regulation because of their genuine love and concern for the children's well-being. In this light, their compliance with the regulation to sleep apart from the children may be understood as resistance to, rather than acceptance of, the management of their emotions.

The foster mothers' resistance to the management of their emotions may also be framed in terms of resistance to the alienation of their affective labor. The foster mothers' handing over of the children to the adoptive parents on the day of the children's departure from their foster homes, what the women referred to as the entrega, was the moment in the adoption process that most saliently represents the alienation of the foster mothers' affective labor. Within the framework of commodification, the entrega becomes the symbolic moment at which the woman's affective labor, contained within the child as its direct beneficiary, became alienated from her. The child's departure marked the end of the woman's employment as that child's

caregiver, the end of her instrumental and affective care for the child. As mentioned above, employers seem to have valued the foster mothers' affective care of the children insofar as it remained manageably temporary and alienable, and the entrega made these aspects of the women's affective labor evident. The entrega was the moment, clearly defined by the fact that the child was no longer in her care, that the woman ceased being like a mother to that child and so made unmistakable the estrangement of her labor, if not entirely of her affection for the child.

In their narratives, however, the foster mothers seemed strongly to resist the alienation of their affective labor. One of the ways they denied the alienation of their labor was to resist what they perceived to be their employers' attempts to treat their fostering much like any other kind of job that could be terminated and to treat their love for the children as easily manageable. From the women's perspective, the entrega was the moment at which their employers expected them to stop loving the children, an expectation they were told would be easier to achieve if they kept their love for the children to a manageable level. For example, Julia mentioned that the employers explained "that we had to, to know that [the children] weren't ours, that we were only caring for them temporarily. And that we shouldn't feel bad when they left," to which she then added, "but, um, always for us it was difficult, you know. Even though we knew that they weren't ours and that they had to go, but it was something difficult for us." For the women, knowing such things, and they were acutely aware that the children were only temporarily with them, did not make the children's departure easier. All of the women I interviewed described how emotionally painful the children's departure was for them because they loved and would miss the children.

Another way the women expressed their resistance to the treatment of their love for the children as alienable was to contrast their own reactions to the entrega with those of their

employers. In contrast to their own pain and emotional responses to the children's departures, the foster mothers described their employers as emotionally distant and callous. In recounting one of the children's departures, Zulma explained that at the hotel, "I was almost crying, because the lawyer said to me, 'well, you already handed him over. There it is. You can go.' Like it'd be that easy. And he took away the child and [put him] into the mom's arms, sometimes crying, sometimes happy, but I left torn apart, but that's how it was." Consistent with Zulma's previous comment about her employer's refusal to provide important medical treatment for the children, her depiction of the entrega demonstrates how the foster mothers often contrasted what they perceived as their employers' callousness with their own emotional concern for the children. Earlier I suggested that, in so doing, they reproduced the dichotomy of economy and affect, which served to emphasize employers' economic motivation and (mis)treatment of children as commodities. Zulma's description of herself as heartbroken and of the lawyer as matter-of-fact and dismissive of her feelings may have also served to emphasize the employers' disregard for and (mis)treatment of the women's affective labor. From the perspective of the foster mothers, employers accepted the alienation of the women's affective labor as part and parcel of conducting business. Yet, even while seeing the situation through their employers' eyes, the foster mothers continued to maintain the inalienability of their affection and concern for the children.

Despite the temporary nature of foster care work, many of the women described their emotional connection to the children as continuing past the entrega into the present, as a permanent part of their fostering experience. In chapter three, I argued that, despite their liminal position as foster care workers, the women expressed a "bothness" rather than an ambivalence about their relationships with the children for whom they cared. I defined this bothness as an

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understanding or acceptance of the nuanced intertwining of otherwise putatively ambiguous concepts. For example, they described their relationships to the children as both non-kin and kin-like and as both temporary and permanent. What endured after the completion of the entrega was the women's love for the children and the pain and sadness brought on by the children's departure.

By understanding their relationships with the children as a bothness—physically temporary but emotionally permanent—it also seems that the women resisted the alienation of their affective labor. For example, many of the women used the metaphor of pieces of their hearts to describe the permanency of their love—the cause of their pain—that maintained their connections with the children. In reference to the pain she felt over the children's departure, Sara said, in the United States "is where my broken heart is, in a pile of little pieces." When the children left, they took a piece of her heart with them. In chapter three I interpreted this statement in this way: despite the physical distance, the deep connection she felt with the children maintains its pull. Olga echoed this sentiment when she said, the child "carries my love with him," what I interpreted as an expression of the love and care she provided being permanent and having lasting effects.

Yet, within the framework of alienation of labor, these two statements can be understood as metaphors for the alienation of the foster mothers' affective labor. Parts of the women's hearts were no longer part of themselves. Instead, these pieces of their hearts, their love, lay within the children for the benefit of the adoptive parents. All of the women I interviewed expressed sadness and suffering over this loss. These two interpretations may appear contradictory, but instead I believe they both accurately represent the women's understandings of their fostering, as another example of the bothness of their experiences. Although the women were alienated from

their affective labor and ceased to be like mothers to the children at the time of the entrega, they also refused to accept this alienation by reframing their love—and the suffering that resulted from it—as a permanent connection with the children, something that could not be severed or alienated. Within this reframing, the liminality of their position as foster mothers continues beyond the entrega and becomes a permanent condition.[27] The women are no longer the children's foster mothers and, yet, they are also still like foster mothers to these children because they believe these children continue to benefit from their love and because they continue to love and miss the children.

Finally, the women's expressions of resistance to the commodification of their affective labor—discussed in this chapter in terms of the management of emotions and alienation of labor—were also resistance to the commodification of the children. Although I have laid out previously the caveat that children are not commodities, I have also argued that children may be (mis)treated as commodities. At the beginning of this section, I described the product of the foster mother's labor as a service sold indirectly to the prospective adoptive parents. Yet, the product of labor may also be a physical "object." In other words, the "product" of the foster mother's labor may be understood more directly as the adoptable child. Within the framework of commodification, the relationship between the worker and the product links the commodification of one to the other (Marx 1988[1844]:71). In this case, the foster mother's affective labor becomes a commodity when it is alienated from her (symbolically) at the time of the child's departure. In turn, the child becomes like a commodity, as a recipient (the product) of the woman's alienated affective labor.

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[27] As mentioned in chapter 1, Kelly (2008) and Garsten (1999) both discuss the concept of liminality as a permanent condition within certain contemporary cultural contexts.

This close relationship between the commodification of the woman's affective labor and the child also means that the woman's refusal to accept the alienability of her affective labor was equally a refusal to accept the commodification of the child. All of the women I interviewed emphasized how much they cared about the children and how much they still missed them. Even though their affective care of the children was marketed, managed, exploited, and alienated, the women continued to express a connection with and genuine love for the children they fostered. By emphasizing the permanency, and thus inalienability, of their love for the children, they also resisted attempts by others, namely, their employers, to (mis)treat the children as commodities. From the perspective of the women, the children, as recipients of their permanent, inalienable love, remained untainted by the market aspects of the adoption process. They remained little boys and girls, not commodities.

CHAPTER 7

REFLECTING ON FOSTER CARE WORK: CLOSURE AND

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In response to escalating domestic and international unrest over numerous reports of

illegal and unethical adoption practices, adoptions from Guatemala to the United States officially

ended on December 31, 2007. Both the US and Guatemalan governments considered the closure

an essential step toward their countries' compliance with Hague Convention guidelines. All

parties agreed that closure was necessary to begin overhauling Guatemala's adoption system and

to protect those people potentially harmed by the unethical practices of the former system,

namely, the biological families. Transition cases—adoption cases filed but not yet finalized prior

to the cut-off date of December 31—continued to be processed under the former adoption

system, although only after a careful second review of the files to verify, to the extent possible,

their legality. As previously noted, many adoptive parents and adoption agencies in the United

States, even when they also felt the closure was necessary, were concerned that, ultimately, the

closure would harm the children it intended to protect. In particular, prospective adoptive parents

of children whose cases were in transition were concerned that further delays would make the

children's adjustment to the United States more difficult.

The foster mothers I interviewed also evaluated the closure of transnational adoption in

Guatemala as at once necessary and harmful. All ten women were aware of the closure of

transnational adoptions, since it effectively marked the end of their employment as paid foster

care workers. They believed the closure was necessary because of the adoption system's ties

with crime and corruption. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the foster mothers were aware

of the existence of kidnapping, the buying and selling of babies, the coercion of biological

mothers to relinquish their children, the falsification of birth certificates and DNA tests, and the

misappropriation of adoption fees. At the same time, most of the women felt the closure of transnational adoptions was "bad" in the sense that it was ultimately harmful to the children's future well-being. Without sufficient private and public social services in Guatemala to assist the children who would otherwise have been adopted internationally, some of the foster mothers feared that these children would be condemned to a life of homelessness and crime.

Sara was acutely aware of the complications caused by the closure in adoptions, since she was still caring for a little girl, Daniela, at the time of my interview with her. Daniela's adoption file was one of the transition cases being reevaluated by CNA, Guatemala's newly established central authority for adoptions. Sara had already obtained Daniela's passport—one of the final steps of the prior adoption system—but, even so, the adoption had been delayed due to some complication unknown to Sara. The agency facilitator who had hired her had only come to visit her four times in two years—the last visit nine months prior to the interview—and owed her several months' salary. The prospective parents had never visited and Sara feared that they had changed their minds. I asked Sara what she thought would happen if the prospective adoptive parents decided not to complete the adoption. Although Sara was angry with them for not visiting or staying in touch, she hoped that the prospective parents would continue waiting, that CNA would approve the case, and that Daniela would be able to live with her parents in the United States. However, if the prospective parents decided to pull out or if CNA denied the case, Sara hoped that the new system would allow her or a family she knew to adopt Daniela. The closure of adoptions had left both Daniela and herself in limbo, and Sara worried about the girl's future. Despite her generally positive views toward transnational adoption and despite the economic and emotional strain the closure of adoptions had caused her, Sara still believed the closure was necessary. When I asked her directly if she thought shutting down transnational

adoptions was important, she answered, "yes, very important. Because there was lots of corruption."

Like Sara, the other foster mothers I interviewed also spoke of the closure of Guatemalan transnational adoption as both necessary and harmful. The women's views toward the closure reflect the complexities of their experiences as paid foster care workers within the context of transnational adoption. In the sections that follow, I summarize the key findings of my analysis of the foster mothers' narratives. I then address the contributions of my research and implications for future research.

<center>Making Sense of It All</center>

This dissertation set out to answer the following questions: How did private-sector foster mothers in Guatemala experience and make sense of their paid care work within the context of US-Guatemalan transnational adoption in which their experiences occurred? What are the meanings that these women gave to this particular bundle of commodified labor and affective caring? Throughout my treatment of these questions, I aimed to provide a narrow focus and a broad scope. My primary interest was to understand what these women thought and felt about the paid work of fostering children in their homes because, although they provided an important service, so little is known about them. At the same time, the women's experiences must be understood within the political economic context that informed and shaped their experiences. As such, understanding and examining their lived experiences also provides valuable insight into the relationship between care work and political economy. Finally, I set out to show how the theoretical approaches I applied—emotive language as disposition and the pairing of "liminality" with "habitus"—serve to illuminate the women's personal experiences.

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My research questions regarding liminality involved the applicability of the concept to the experiences of paid foster care workers: Did the foster mothers experience their fostering as liminal? That is, did they express or acknowledge the cultural ambiguity of their fostering as paid employment and affective relationship? If so, does this necessarily mean they felt ambivalent toward their care work or the relationships they developed with others associated with the adoption process? The research questions I posed regarding kinship were aimed at understanding the establishment of kin and kin-like relations—both permanent and temporary—within the context of paid foster care work: What did it mean to paid foster care workers to be "like" mothers to the children under their care? How did the foster mothers understand their capacity to provide socioeconomic support and affective care to the children in comparison to the biological and adoptive parents? How did their (mis)recognition of differences in socioeconomic resources serve to reproduce or challenge unequal relations of power or to make sense of their own role in the formation of kinship? Research questions concerning the concept of "care work" were aimed at understanding how the foster mothers made sense of such work within the political economic context in which it was experienced: What might looking at fostering as paid care work tell us about the women's experiences and, in turn, what might their experiences reveal about paid care work? How does the political economic context in which paid foster care workers find themselves affect their own understandings of their care work? How did they make sense of the "market" aspects of the adoption process and their place in it? What aspects of their care work did they experience as exploitative, satisfying, or both? How do the women's subjective understandings of paid care work inform their understandings and evaluation of the objective conditions?

In the United States and Guatemala, a set of related binaries continue to inform our understanding of kinship and economy as mutually exclusive realms, namely, private and public, unpaid care and paid work, and love and money. Yet, in the current international political economic context, the creation of kinship through transnational adoption is not possible without economic transactions, such as agency and lawyer fees, airplane tickets, and visa processing fees. While consideration of the interconnection of adoption and market may be unsettling for some people, within adoption, US-Guatemalan adoption was a desirable and well established way of creating and expanding families and the adoption system functioned as a type of market in which money was exchanged for services. In most cases, one of the services for which prospective adoptive parents indirectly paid as part of the agencies' or lawyers' fees was the child care provided by foster mothers. The individualized care the foster mothers provided to the children was also one of the features that made adoption from Guatemala so appealing to adoptive parents.

Private-sector foster mothers in Guatemala were at the intersection of the set of culturally informed binaries regarding economy and kinship and, as such, their care work can be understood as a liminal position. Fostering was both paid employment and a caring, kin-like relationship with children. The women received monetary compensation for their services, and their services were an integral part of creating families through Guatemalan adoption to the United States and other countries. The existence of the women's paid foster care work and their experiences fostering put into question the cultural binaries that defined their fostering as liminal. Yet, despite their lived experiences in which such binaries coexisted, the foster mothers I interviewed had difficulty reconciling the affective aspects with the economic aspects of their care work. By analyzing the women's narratives through the lenses of liminality and emotive

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language as disposition, I found that how the foster mothers felt toward and made sense of their paid foster care work depended on the particular aspect or relationship in question: they expressed clarity toward their relationship with their employers, ambivalence toward their care work and their relation to the biological mothers and adoptive parents, and a bothness toward their relationship with the children. That is, the women understood their relationships with the children as a nuanced intertwining of otherwise putatively ambiguous concepts, such as emotional closeness and distance, kin-like and non-kin, and temporary and permanent.

The foster mothers I interviewed clearly expressed that aspects of the job were exploitative. They held their employers solely responsible for such exploitation and depicted them as greedy, callous, distrusting, deceptive, and unreasonable. According to the women, exploitative conditions included late payment of wages, insufficient provision of material resources for the children's care like formula and clothing, dismissal of the women's mothering skills and affection for the children, unrealistic expectations regarding the care of the children, and refusal to cover certain medical costs the women believed to be necessary for the children's well-being. From the foster mothers' perspective, employers took advantage of their vulnerability as care workers and their concern and love for the children. Once the women had legal custody of the children, they felt a moral obligation to provide care to them and also became emotionally invested in their well-being. The obligation and attachment to the children the women felt limited their options for resolving the exploitation they experienced at the hands of their employers. The risks of terminating employment in other kinds of work differed importantly from the risks of quitting work as a foster mother: if the women were unhappy with the conditions of their employment, they felt they could not stop doing the work without harming the children in their care. In addition to this aspect of their work which appears to have made

them especially vulnerable to exploitation, I also found that the women's vulnerability was exacerbated by the private location of their care work in the home and because of the indirect participation of the prospective adoptive parents. While the women believed their employers kept tight control of communication between foster mothers and prospective adoptive parents as a way to obscure their misappropriation of fees and mistreatment of the children, employers' control of communication also obscured from the parents any exploitation the foster mothers may have endured.

While employers took advantage of the foster mothers' affection for the children, they further exploited the women's affective labor by expecting them to manage their emotions, to provide just the right level of emotional care for the children while also remaining emotionally distant. Although the women understood and acknowledged that their care of the children was temporary and that part of their care work involved their eventual disappearance from the children's lives, the permanence of the love they felt toward the children made it difficult to accept their employers' attempts to manage their emotions. They were hurt and angered when their employers treated their love as alienable labor. The women's resistance to the alienability of their affective labor was most salient in their narratives regarding the abruptness of the entrega, the point at which they became acutely aware of the temporary nature of their care work. In contrast to employers' callous dismissal of the women's feelings during the entrega, the foster mothers depicted their own reaction to the children's departure as emotionally painful, and described this pain and their love for the children as permanent, enduring parts of their fostering experience. By understanding their relationships with the children in terms of bothness— physically temporary but emotionally permanent—and by emphasizing the inalienability of their

love for the children, they resisted attempts by their employers to commodify their affective

labor.

Although the foster mothers were clear about their evaluations of their employers, they

expressed ambivalence toward their paid care work, particularly regarding the fairness of the

wages attached to such work. Although some of the women assessed their wages as unfair in

comparison to what their employers earned and in terms of the amount of instrumental work

caring for children around-the-clock requires, they generally seemed ill at ease when considering

how their wages were unfair, specifically because, in their view, fostering was not just any job. It

was *care* work that required close affectionate relationships with babies and small children. The

women seemed to understand their care work as not commodifiable because of the affection they

felt toward the children. I found that, by speaking "honestly," the women expressed at once

sincerity and unease regarding their economic motivation for seeking foster care employment.

By qualifying their statements with the conjunction *but*, the women acknowledged a tension

between what a job was supposed to be for them—fulfillment of purely economic need—and

what this special type of job required of them—the fulfillment of the emotional needs of another,

which was also emotionally gratifying for them.

By misrecognizing subjective ideas regarding gender and work as objective conditions,

the foster mothers assessed their wages as fairer than they may have otherwise done. Although

the women understood the value of their affective bonds with the children, they simultaneously

undervalued the economic, market value of the affective aspects of their care work by

associating the work with mothering, which they understood to be "natural" and "not work." The

women spoke in ways that justified their economic reasons for fostering; they prioritized the

affective motives over the economic incentives for fostering in an attempt to mitigate their

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unease. In so doing, they reproduced doxa—that is, the taken-for-granted cultural ideals regarding money and love—that defined their work as liminal, but also seemed to rely on these same cultural assumptions to feel good about their work. Paradoxically, they used doxa—the underlying cause of their ambivalence—to attempt to reduce their unease.

The foster mothers also expressed ambivalence toward their liminal relation to the biological mothers and adoptive parents. In the foster mothers' own comparative evaluations of the capacities of biological mothers and adoptive parents to provide affective care to the children, I found that the foster mothers misrecognized and acknowledged socioeconomic inequalities in ways that helped them make sense of, and feel good about, their liminal positions as temporary care workers. Although they explicitly acknowledged the socioeconomic inequalities between the United States and Guatemala, they simultaneously reproduced them by misrecognizing the biological mothers' economic poverty as affective poverty and the adoptive parents' relative economic wealth as a superior capacity to love. The foster mothers' evaluation of each type of parent as progressively better, through what I referred to as a betterment narrative, allowed the women to view their care work as an integral part of improving the children's lives and to feel that their affective labor, and their families' suffering, had not been in vain.

Within the betterment narrative, the foster mothers' middle position between the biological mothers and adoptive parents meant that they provided "better" love to the children than the biological mothers and lesser love than the adoptive parents. However, this evaluation was incongruent with their own feelings toward the children. The women expressed pride and confidence in their care work and believed they had given the children their best. Given this incongruity and the lack of contact they had with the adoptive parents, the foster mothers

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expressed a degree of uncertainty about the adoptive parents' capacity to provide the children

with the best possible love. Through the expression *ojalá*, the foster mothers expressed an

uncertain hopefulness about the children's lives in the United States. They wanted to believe the

children were well loved by their adoptive parents, but could not know for sure that this was true.

Despite this hesitation, they ultimately appeared to attempt to minimize their unease by

imagining for the children a future filled with better socioeconomic opportunities—that which

they could assure themselves was true—over a future filled with love—that which they could

only hope was true.

Despite the liminality of their care work and the ambivalence they expressed toward the

other adults involved in the adoption process, the foster mothers expressed clearly that they cared

deeply for the children. The women's narratives suggested that they felt emotionally close to the

children, but the context in which they cared for these children also required them to maintain

distance. I interpreted this coexistence not as an ambivalence on their part, but as a bothness.

Through their use of the phrase *como si fuera*, the women described their relationship with the

children as being both like a mother and only "like" a mother. They were similar to mothers in

that the children lived in their homes, the women were solely responsible for meeting the

children's emotional and physical needs, and the women and children were emotionally and

physically close while the children were under their care. Yet, the women were different from

mothers in that their care of the children was temporary, their employers imposed regulations

regarding the care of the children, and part of their work was assisting in the kinning process

between the children and their adoptive families. While the women's narratives regarding the

entrega demonstrated how their relationship with the children was both temporary and

permanent, the women's discussions about the children's sleeping arrangements highlighted the

bothness regarding closeness and distance. Although employers required foster mothers to use the sleep training method in an attempt to manage their emotions, the women who complied with this regulation came to understand the physical and emotional distance promoted by sleep training to be beneficial to the children's well-being. They chose to sleep apart from the children out of love and concern for them, not as a work obligation or as a service to the prospective adoptive parents. Their maintenance of physical and emotional distance toward the children, then, may be understood not as an ambivalence toward the children, but as a further expression of the women's concern and affection for them.

In summary, private-sector fostering in Guatemala was a type of paid care work that required both affective and instrumental care of children. Fostering did not feel like a job to these women because they felt like mothers to the children under their care, but the women felt only "like" mothers to the children, in part, because fostering was a job. The fact of their employment put conditions on their status as mothers; by definition, their care work was temporary. Nevertheless, the permanent love they felt toward the children also conditioned how they conceptualized fostering in terms of work. Even though the foster mothers' affective care of the children was marketed, managed, exploited, and alienated, the women continued to express a connection with and genuine love for the children they fostered.

While the foster mothers recognized and participated in the market aspects of the transnational adoption system, they also rejected the commodification of children. I argued that the women's resistance to the alienation of their affective labor was also resistance to the commodification of the children. The women expressed both an understanding of the commodification of their care work and of the children, and a refusal to accept the alienability of their affective labor and, thus, a refusal to treat children as commodities. As part of care work

within the context of the transnational adoption market, the women often developed genuine love and affection for the children *and* this maternal love was commodified. The foster mothers lived the experience as a personal, loving, kin-like, yet simultaneously distant and only kin-"like," relationship with the children under their care and as fulfilling, albeit often exploitative, employment.

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Contributions and Implications
for Future Research

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This dissertation has drawn on four main bodies of literature: the political economy of transnational adoption, care work, the anthropology of emotion, and liminality. In this concluding section, I discuss the contributions of my research to each of these four areas as well as implications for future research.

Despite the growing anthropological research on transnational adoption in the United States and Europe, most studies focus on the adoption triad of child, adoptive parents, and biological parents of adoptions from China and Korea (e.g., Volkman 2005; Dorow 2006; Howell 2006). Little attention is given to the experiences of the paid care workers who care for children during the adoption process. This dissertation on Guatemalan foster mothers broadens the research on transnational adoption by providing a case from another country and including other participants of the adoption process. While the two studies of Guatemalan adoption files by non-governmental and governmental agencies (ILPEC 2000; Casa Alianza et al. 2007) provided useful demographic and socioeconomic data on Guatemalan foster mothers for my research, neither study examined the experiences of foster mothers in any depth. The only other study of Guatemalan foster mothers is by Gibbons, Wilson, and Schnell (2009). This important study called attention to the foster parents' views toward the transnational adoption process and their reflections on what they understood the biological mothers' and adoptive parents' experiences to

be. However, their study focuses more on the foster parents' outward perceptions of others than on the foster parents' own personal experiences fostering.

My research complements and furthers these previous studies by focusing on the women's experiences of their own temporary care work and relationships with the children under their care, their employers, and the biological and adoptive parents. In addition to addressing the foster mothers' perceptions of others, my research focuses on what the women thought and felt about fostering children in their homes within the political economic context of transnational adoption. In so doing, I demonstrated the positive contributions these women made to the adoption process as well as the negative conditions they endured. Future research on transnational adoption would benefit from moving beyond the adoption triad and examining the implications of the adoption process for all people involved. As studies have found that children who reside in foster care prior to adoption have better growth and cognitive development than those who reside in orphanages prior to adoption (Miller et al. 2005:710), private and public foster care systems are likely to develop in other sending countries. What challenges and problems might foster care workers in other countries experience?

This dissertation drew on the "money and love" literature on care work. Recent literature on care work has addressed the issue of the potential exploitation of the affective aspects of paid care work in two main ways: the "commodification of emotion" framework (Bubeck 1995; Hochschild 2003), and the "love and money" framework (Uttal and Tuominen 1999; England 2005). The money and love approach expands the analysis of care work beyond the potential exploitative aspects of the work, thus attempting to reflect more accurately how care workers experience their work. My research on paid foster mothers in Guatemala contributes to this literature by integrating the concept of commodification into the money and love approach,

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rather than viewing these approaches as opposing. Although the application of commodification to care work has been criticized for tending solely to the harmful aspects of care work (England 2005), I argue that the application of materialist concepts—such as exploitation, commodification, and alienation of labor—does not preclude one from exploring the positive dimensions of care work as well. On the contrary, ignoring how transnational adoption mirrored other markets and commodification threatens to tend solely to the positive aspects of adoption and care work and, as such, constitutes a disservice to care workers and children.

Drawing on both Marx's (1988[1844]) explanation of the link between the commodification of the worker's labor and the commodification of the product produced and on Hochschild's (1983) explanation of alienated affective labor in the service industry, I concluded that foster mothers' affective labor became a commodity when it was alienated from them (symbolically) at the time of the children's departure. In turn, the children, as recipients of the women's alienated affective labor, became like commodities. I argued that this close relationship between the commodification of women's affective labor and of children also meant that the woman's refusal to accept the alienability of their affective labor was equally a refusal to accept the commodification of children. Yet, I was only able to come to this conclusion through an analysis of emotive language in the foster mothers' narratives. The women's expressions of enduring love and descriptions of their care work as fulfilling revealed the limitations of their employers' attempts to commodify their affective care and also signaled the women's resistance to the alienation of their love for the children. Applying the commodification of emotion framework to the case of foster mothers, I have argued, provides insight into the foster mothers' own understandings of how others involved in the adoption process (mis)treated them and the children, particularly in the case of their direct employers. While commodification may not be an

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appropriate framework in all cases of care work, my research raises the question as to whether the commodification of the affective labor of other types of care workers also has a direct relationship to the commodification of the children under their care.

My research also contributes to the anthropological literature on emotive discourse. While I was interested in understanding the social and political aspects of expressions of emotion, I was equally concerned with doing justice to the personal as individually felt, in this case, what the foster mothers thought and felt about their own experiences. Through my analysis of the foster mothers' narratives, I developed a theoretical approach to emotive language that applies Bourdieu's concept of "habitus," what I refer to as emotive language as disposition. For Bourdieu (1977), habitus, a system of dispositions, is everything the members of a group intuit about the social system and about acting within it. Dispositions are the particular ways individuals act, think, and feel and are acquired, often unconsciously, through the practices of everyday life. Within this framework, emotion and emotive language can be understood as dispositions (Reed-Danahay 2005:102). As such, emotive language expresses personally felt experiences and reflects taken-for-granted cultural assumptions that shape personal experiences.

Few analytic approaches to emotion have applied Bourdieu's concepts directly (Reed-Danahay 2005:102). I found that bringing Bourdieu's work on habitus into conversation with emotive language provides a way to conceptualize how emotive language functions both to express personal experiences and to perpetuate unequal structures of power. We experience emotion as both mind and body, thought and feeling, but understand and express our emotive experiences, in large part, within the dichotomies reproduced through habitus. These dichotomies help us make sense of and find meaning, even satisfaction, in our experiences. Since dispositions are flexible as well as durable, emotive language expresses and reflects people's meaningful

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personal experiences as well as the underlying social, cultural, and political economic context in which they are expressed.

My analysis of the foster mothers' frequent use of honesty phrases is one example of how emotive language as disposition adds to an understanding of emotive discourse. Edwards and Fasulo (2006:348) determined that speakers used honesty phrases to assert the sincerity of the objective, factual information they were reporting as well as their subjective feelings, thoughts, or motivation for reporting it. Edwards and Fasulo (2006:371–372) also found that speakers used honesty phrases to preface responses they expected the listener to find problematic. However, they limited their analysis to examples of conversations in which the reasons for the problematic nature of responses were straightforward. My analysis of the foster mothers' use of honesty phrases provides an example in which the problematic nature of responses is not immediately obvious. Elaborating on Edwards' and Fasulo's approach, I suggested that people may speak "honestly" about claims that put into question, even if ever so slightly, doxa of the topic at hand. The speakers perceive, or perhaps feel ill at ease, that the listener may find what they are claiming difficult or surprising to hear because it goes against the grain of underlying cultural assumptions.

Finally, this dissertation has contributed to the literature on the political economy of liminality and the emotional aspects of liminality. Few anthropologists have brought together Turner's work on liminality with Bourdieu's work on habitus (Ghannam 2011). Yet, I have found this combination central to an understanding of how liminality works in terms of political economy. Both Turner (1967; 1977[1969]) and Bourdieu (1977) were concerned with how sociopolitical structures are maintained or reproduced and relied on an examination of cultural dichotomies or categories, Turner through the ambiguous nature of liminality and Bourdieu

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through the process of misrecognition. Through my analysis of the foster mothers' narratives, I found that they (mis)recognized doxa and socioeconomic inequalities in specific ways that helped them make sense of their liminal position, but that misrecognition also served to reproduce the doxa that defined their care work as liminal. This combined approach could be applied to other types of paid care work, as well as any other position that can be understood as liminal, as a way to understand how liminal persons make sense of their ambiguous status within the political economic context in which their experiences occur.

Recent research on liminality has conceptualized liminality as an internal, emotional space that is individually experienced (Kelly 2008). By considering the emotive discourse of liminal persons, Kelly's (2008) research on the sense of loss felt by unpaid caregivers advances our understanding of the emotional aspects of liminality by demonstrating how personal experiences interrelate with and are informed by cultural meanings and social relationships. Yet, Kelly and other scholars who emphasize the emotive aspects of liminality do not address directly the concept of ambivalence (Honkasalo 2001; Kelly 2008). By approaching the liminality of care work through the lens of emotive language as disposition, my research further advances our understanding of the emotive and political economic aspects of liminality by examining the relationship between ambiguity and ambivalence. I found that the inclusion of ambivalence to the discussion of liminality served to emphasize how the personal is social, and also how the social is interpreted within the experiences of individuals.

In Guatemala, paid foster care workers' positions were necessarily ambiguous because they could be understood as both caring and economic, and as both kin-like and non-kin, within a political economic context in which such cultural notions were understood as separate categories. Despite the cultural ambiguities surrounding their paid care work, the women did not necessarily

feel ambivalent toward all aspects of their fostering experience. As noted in the previous section, they felt ambivalent toward some aspects of their work, clarity toward others, and a bothness toward their relationship with the children.

While Guatemalan transnational adoption came to an official end in 2007 and, with it, private-sector foster care, the experiences of Guatemalan foster mothers provide insight into understanding the political economy of care work and kin work. Even though we generally consider kinship and economy—or care and work, private and public, and personal and social— to be distinct categories, they do not function independently of each other. Instead, each shapes the other. Although critical reflection upon our lived experiences at work or with family may make clear that such notions are not really opposite or contradictory, we often find it difficult to reconcile the coexistence of the affective and economic dimensions of work and family life. Applying the theoretical framework of emotive language as disposition brings to the fore both of these dimensions, the affective and the economic, and how they intertwine and inform each other in our daily lives. These seemingly fuzzy areas where categories overlap are the spaces to explore in more depth, as a way to further our understanding of how we make sense of the world.

Since the closure in Guatemalan transnational adoptions put an end to private-sector foster care in Guatemala, future research on these foster mothers would benefit from detailed archival work—of news sources and PGN adoption files—and oral histories—of other family members present or involved in the fostering of children preceding their adoptions (fathers, children, and extended family) as well as others who were involved in the adoption process (lawyers, adoption facilitators, adoptive parents, and the children who were adopted)—to expand on a history of private-sector fostering in Guatemala that investigates the impact the transnational adoption system had on all those involved.

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Another direction research on US-Guatemalan adoption could take includes a study of the families in the United States who adopted children from Guatemala. What impact did the US-Guatemalan transnational adoption process—in particular, the market aspects of adoption, the revelation of its ties to corruption, and the subsequent closure of adoptions—have on adoptive parents' and children's understandings of their adoptions from Guatemala? How has the knowledge that adoptions in Guatemala were tied to illicit activities changed the parents' perceptions about the adoption process of their children? Has it affected, or will it affect, the ways in which they discuss, or withhold information concerning, the adoption of their children with them? How might the awareness of the problems associated with US-Guatemalan adoption shape the children's understandings of their adoptions from Guatemala? How might these understandings differ from the understandings of those children adopted from other countries? Although answers to many of these questions may have to wait until a larger majority of the children adopted from Guatemala reach adulthood, seeking such answers may be a matter of social justice. A better understanding of the effects of the former Guatemalan transnational adoption process could serve to improve adoption policies and practices in ways that would make a difference in the lives of children and the adults who care for them.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FOSTER MOTHER INTERVIEWS

How did you begin caring for children who were waiting to be adopted? Why did you decide to

do this?

How many children have you cared for? When? What ages? How long did each child stay with

you?

When the children were living with you, what was your daily routine? What did you do for the

children?

Who else lived in your home? Are there other members of your family that do not live with you?

Did everyone help out with the care of the children? In what ways?

Where did the children sleep? What did they eat? Did you feed them the same type of food that

you gave your biological children?

Did your biological children understand that the foster children would be leaving one day? How

did you explain this?

Did the (foster) child understand that (s)he would be leaving your home for another? How did

you prepare him/her for that day? What did you say to him/her? How did you prepare

yourself?

Do you think of fostering as a type of job?

Who hired you: an adoption agency, the adoptive parents, the state, or someone else?

When the children were living with you, did you have legal custody? Did you have to get

approval from the government? How did it work?

How did the pay work? Was there a distinction between your pay and money to cover the child's

necessities? In your opinion, was the pay fair? Who paid for education, medical, and food

expenses?

Do you know the adoptive parents? What is your relationship with them? Did they visit when the

children were living with you? Do they still visit? Do they send mail or photos?

Did the adoptive parents offer additional assistance for the children? If so, what type? How did

you feel about this assistance? Did the adoptive parents offer suggestions on how to care for

the children?

Have you stayed in touch with the children or the adoptive parents?

Did you meet the biological mother or father? Did you have contact with them during the

adoption process?

Do you know other women who fostered children? Did you talk to each other about fostering

children?

How do you feel about the children leaving Guatemala and going to the United States?

What previous and current jobs have you held?

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