



Death from a distance

Loss, presence and regret in the narratives surrounding deceased parents of Latin American migrants in the north of England

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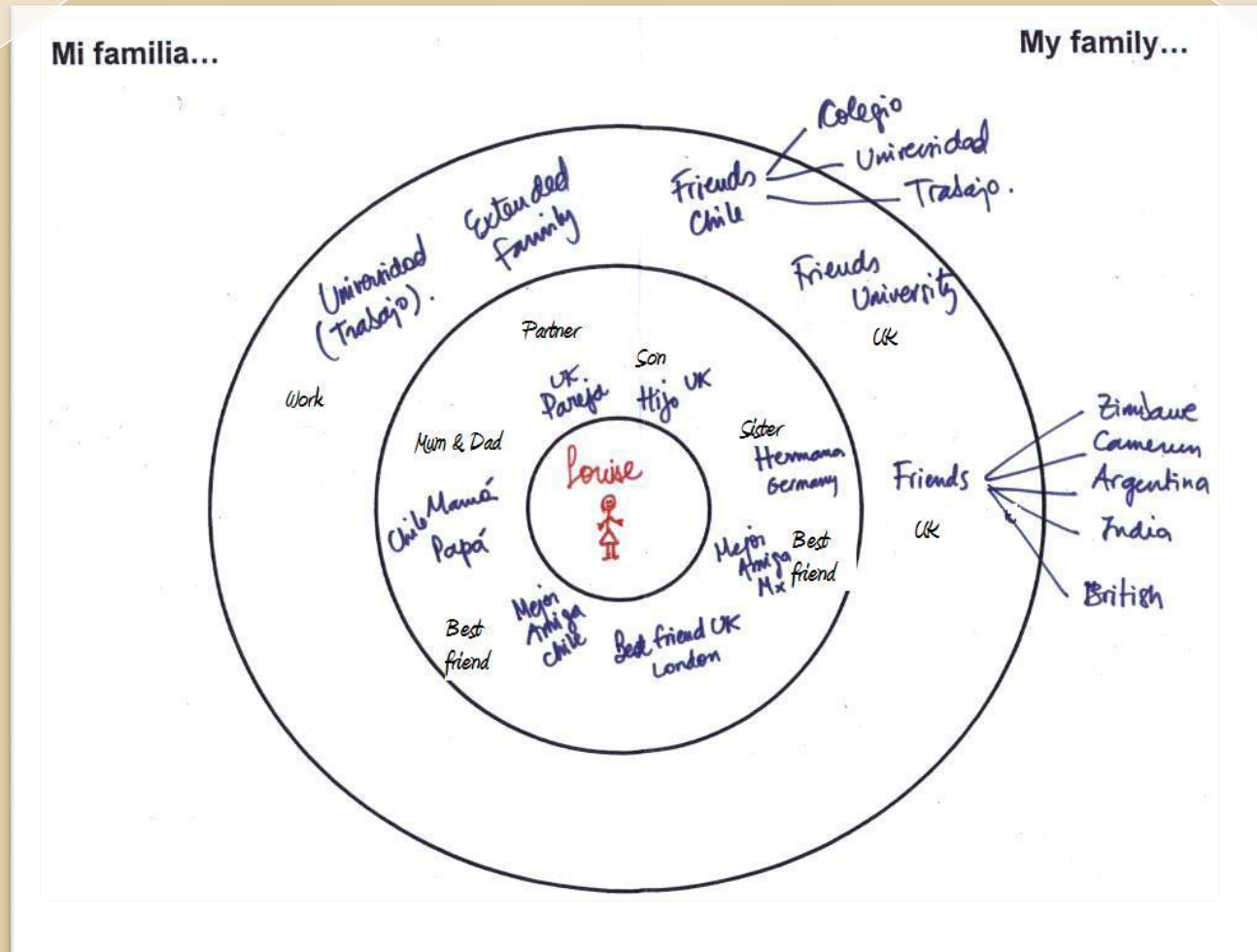




Introduction

- Exploratory paper:
 - Transnational geographies of intimacy and family relationships
 - Emotion and migration
 - Geographies of death and bereavement
- Structure of the presentation:
 - Latin Americans in the north of England
 - Conceptual framework
 - Migrants' emotional experiences of bereavement
 - Concluding reflections

Latin Americans in the north of England



Focus of the paper: Adult Latin American participants' family diagrams and in-depth semi-structured interviews about (transnational) family relationships, life (migration) story interviews and family interview with biographical objects.

- ✓ Socio-cultural invisibility - scarce 'local' shared spaces and social groups. Only approx. 7% of the population resides in this area of England (2011 Census, ONS, 2012).
- ✓ Project conducted with 10 Latin American and Latino-British families in the north of England (all adults and children - over 8 years of age - in the household), 30 participants in total and 14 additional informants.
- ✓ Multiple fieldwork activities with adults, children and households.



Conceptual framework

- ‘Continuing bonds’ (e.g. Klass et al., 1996; Klass, 2006; Root & Exline, 2014; Hall, 2014)
 - This model has also been used to understand the ways in which migrants ‘mourn’ elements of the society and culture they have left behind (Henry et al., 2005)
- Ambivalence: “coexistence of ‘opposing affective orientations towards the same person, object or symbol’” (Smelser, 1997, 5 cited in Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015, 76).

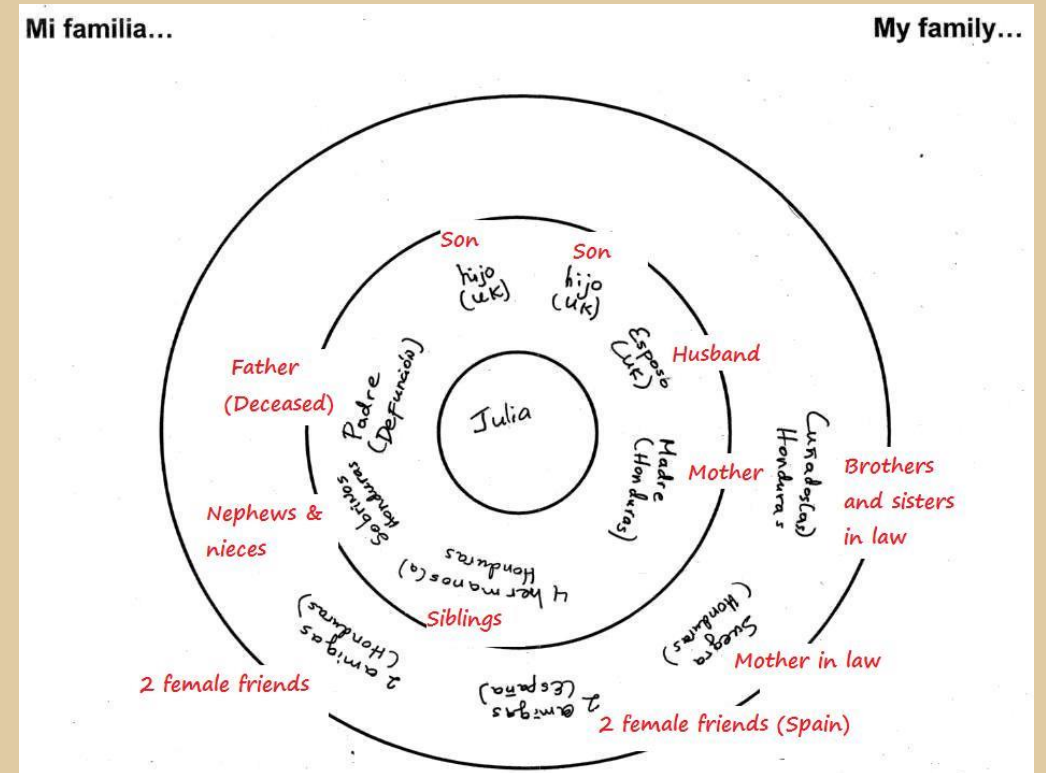
Continuing bonds

Julia (40s, Honduran)

'My father is not alive but he is a person who is in my memory always...'

'Our relationship, all of us, as a family has always been very close, very close in everything (...) very close affectively, very close if we have a problem, well in all senses, and he was the pillar who made sure that this union didn't disappear.'

'So I brought it [a miniature Honduran flag] with me because she [her mother] had given it to us, and many more things (...) my mother gave me things that belonged to my father, memories I have of him (...) I can leave anything behind except these [things], except these.'



Julia's family diagram

Author's translation from Spanish

Loss and the ambivalence of the migration project

Juanjo (40s, Honduran)

There is something about my emigration that has deeply affected me (...) **I lost my father last year and this for me has been the most bitter pill to swallow**, because I was very, very, very attached to my father, that is with my father [we went] everywhere together, everything, everything, everything [we did together]. And then I was not even able to go to his funeral, nothing, then that has hurt me a lot, it has really hurt me, then I think that's one of the painful things that has been very hard and **one of the reasons why I do not want to go back immediately, I do not care if I go back immediately to Honduras or not, because I have this resentment**, with Spain too because of the same reason, because I try to make sense of all this...

Author's translation from Spanish

Continuing bonds and the migrant condition

Maria Jose, 30s Mexican

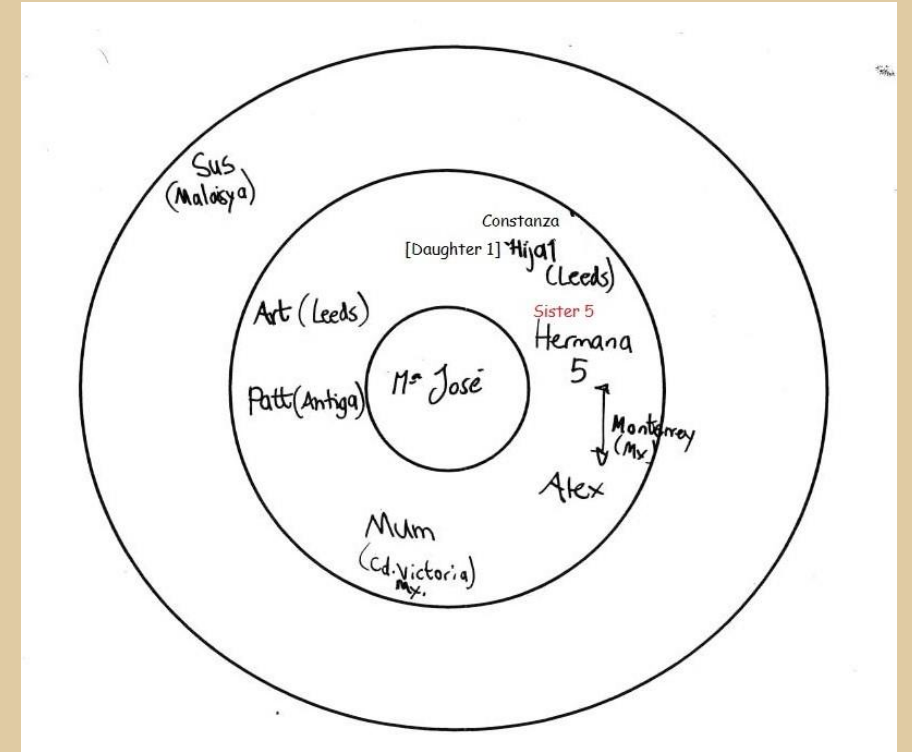
I always thought that when you grow up, you have a clear idea that people grow old, they become sick, some go earlier, some go later and life continues more or less the same (...) **I firmly believe that when someone dies, they don't really go until you forget them, from your mind completely, if they are in your mind and in your heart, then they are with you**, so life continues more or less the same. But well, my dad was ill for nearly two years and in November last year, he got too tired, he gave up, my poor one... and I really believed that it was the time to understand the process and then move on, **but no, people change, well I can tell you that it hurts my soul, but it's no longer the same.** It is like if you didn't know any longer where you are in the world, not geographically but in a philosophical sense if you like, now you don't have that bond to a line back, it's like, it's from you down (...)

Author's translation from Spanish

Maria Jose, 30s Mexican

All the process [father's illness and passing], it did affect each of us in many ways, I lived it from afar... (...) **but I did not agree with some things when he was ill, there were things I didn't understand why they were doing them**, but my sisters always thought, two of my sisters thought that he was fine, it didn't matter what it was, and **that difference of opinion, I don't mean that it creates a split but it gives you a perspective of a person that you didn't have before** (...) it's like a side that you say, **I didn't know this side of you and I don't know if I like it** [laughs and cries at the same time].

When I'm at home, I speak to my mum, I speak to my sisters, and it's all so complex and more difficult, see, it's more that I think that (...) **distance even helps me** but, well, that's another thing I need to forgive myself about, because for me that's a bit of cowardice, that is **I want to be away for a while, I think it's easier for me, I should be able to do it there, but for now I know I can't, so then it wouldn't be easier being there.**



Maria Jose's family diagram

Author's translation from Spanish



Concluding reflections

- In the migrant experience, 'continuing bonds' with deceased significant others left in the country of origin may become integrated into the wider 'loss-scape' created by the act of migration, which includes all the family, social and cultural elements 'lost' by physical separation and distance.
- This may lead to:
 - Permanence of 'continuing bonds' with a deceased significant other as part of the emotional support network of the migrant
 - Regret and the reinforcement of 'ambivalent' emotions regarding the migration project
 - Physical distance from the transnational family may be perceived as 'therapeutic', providing the emotional space to work through family changes and disagreements
- In-depth understandings of the emotional processes of bereavement among migrants may help to further illuminate transnational geographies of intimacy and family life as well as the migration experience in all its complexity.



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