

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Work as affective care: Visiting parents' experiences of paid work abroad

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Abstract

This article offers the concept of 'work as affective care' to explore the entanglement between financial and affective in transnational life. This is discussed in relation to practices of paid work by nonmigrant older parents during visits to their adult children abroad, an understudied dimension in the visiting friends and relatives, transnational family, and ageing scholarship. Drawing on ethnographic research with Brazilian transnational families, the article makes two distinct contributions. First, it emphasizes the broader repertoire of activities performed during visits, namely paid work outside the family household. Second, it underscores a temporal dimension to visits, namely prolonged stays. The discussion reveals a financial dimension to care where paid work acts as a form of affective care across places and generations. While often described positively, the intersections between financial and affective goals are not always harmonious, and material and affective needs can prove difficult to reconcile.

KEYWORDS

affective care, Brazil, paid work, transnational family, United States, visits

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INTRODUCTION

Visiting friends and relatives (VFR) is an intensifying global phenomenon. Its global reach and variety of practices developed during visits help explain the interest this topic has generated across disciplines. Scholars of migration and mobilities, in particular, have widely recognized the importance of such forms of temporary migration and mobility and their considerable economic, cultural and networking implications (Janta et al., 2015). Among these, migrants' (and their offspring) visits to the natal home have been more extensively examined, with studies providing rich insight into the interactions and complex negotiations taking place during visits to extended family and friends (e.g., Baldassar, 2001; Baykara-Krumme, 2013). A second type of VFR mobilities, that of nonmigrants visiting migrant relatives abroad, also identified as counter-VFR mobilities, on the other hand, has remained relatively understudied (Miah & King, 2021). Within this subset of research, existing work has focused, for instance, on reproductive labour and care within the household (e.g., caring for grandchildren, helping with daily household chores) (see, e.g., Baldassar et al., 2007; Nedelcu & Wyss, 2020; Zhou, 2018). However, the broader repertoire of activities performed during visits, namely *paid work* outside the family household, remains mostly uncharted.

This article enriches this body of scholarship by extending analyses beyond unpaid reproductive labour within the family household to explore practices of short-term paid work carried out by older parents while visiting their adult children abroad. The work outside the children's household entails paid short-term informal activities alongside family members (e.g., housekeeping) and working independently of their offspring (e.g., babysitting, kitchen help). In this regard, the focus on VFR is an important lens because it reveals empirical dimensions of transnational familyhood that remain less explored in the literature on ageing and migration.

Drawing on the accounts of Brazilian (older) parents to the United States and their adult children abroad, and ethnographic observations with both groups, the article discusses parent visitors' practices of paid work not only as means of financial support but also, centrally, as forms of affective care in the transnational family. Work as affective care refers to practices of short-term casual paid work that, besides some financial gain, crucially act as forms of emotional bonding and mutual support between migrants and nonmigrant family visitors.

The article makes two distinct contributions to the study of visits in transnational context. First, it emphasizes the broader range of activities performed during extended visits, focusing on casual paid jobs. Second, it explores the varying temporalities of visits, specifically prolonged stays, and their multiple purposes, including both affective and material aims. More broadly, this article joins scholarly efforts to analyse the instrumental and the emotional as complementary dimensions in migrant life and further conceptualize affective mobilities, recognizing the role of emotions in triggering, reconfiguring and halting human movement (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015; Bondi et al., 2007; Svašek, 2008).

The article starts by mapping out key debates on VFR, transnational families and work in later life to situate and foreground the article's central argument of work as affective care. The second and third sections present the research setting and outline the methods and data analysis process. Section four empirically illustrates older parents' extended visits abroad and their experiences of short-term paid work in their affective and material components. The article closes with a summary of the main findings and identifies avenues for future research.

NONMIGRANT TRANSNATIONAL VISITS AND SHORT-TERM PAID WORK UNDER (IM)MOBILITY REGIMES

Travels to visit friends and relatives have been identified as a key component of mobility and temporary migration with myriad social implications. In their overview of the field, Janta et al. (2015) identify five major practices or purposes within VFR mobilities: social relationships, care provision, sustaining identities and roots, maintenance of territorial rights and leisure tourism. A number of studies have documented the experiences of migrants visiting their natal home

and the social re-adjustments and varying anxieties and negotiations that unfold in such contexts (Baldassar, 2001; Oepen, 2013). Unlike migrants' visits to the country of origin, nonmigrants' visits to their migrant relatives abroad have received comparatively less attention (Miah & King, 2021).

A central theme in nonmigrant visits to the migrant family is the role of unpaid reproductive labour during those stays. Scholars have considered, in particular, care exchange across borders (Baldassar et al., 2007) and examined in detail the role of grandparents as chief reproductive labour within the household. By taking care of domestic chores and the grandchildren, 'migrating grannies' (and grandfathers) (King & Vullnetari, 2006) allow adult children to focus on their careers while saving precious financial resources for the migrant household. In such contexts where there are no additional lodging costs, visits normally take place for extended periods, or as long as legally permitted. However, prolonged visits are not always smooth sailing and tensions, frustrations and even open conflict can ensue within the household (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2020). These experiences reveal the complex interconnections between mobility and affect and the role that the latter can play in initiating, accompanying, altering and stopping movement and reconfiguring relationships with space, place and others (Glaveanu & Womersley, 2021). Indeed, feelings and emotional needs can serve as catalysts and conduits of mobility, acting to 'enhance and secure particular forms of transnational labour mobility' (Conradson & McKay, 2007, p. 172).

Work outside the household, exactly like inside it, has a strong affective component to it. However, unlike work within the domestic space, paid work outside the household has remained largely absent from VFR debates and much less so when older adults are considered. Within the scholarship underscoring later life agency and older adults' ability to seize opportunities over the life course (Ciobanu et al., 2017; Horn & Schweppe, 2015; King et al., 2017; Näre et al., 2017; Sampaio, 2022; Walsh & Näre, 2016), a number of studies have explored in greater detail the experiences of permanent relocation and engagement in paid work well into later life (Lulle & King, 2016; Solari, 2018). Such life course strategies are articulated as acts of repositioning—physical, social, and/or symbolic—relating to experiences of financial insecurity, social disadvantage, cumulative inequality, intergenerational responsibilities and the state's failure to provide a decent living in (later) life (Amrith, 2021; Grenier et al., 2020; Lamb, 2013). Importantly, none of the studies above examines paid work (i.e., remunerated activities that provide income to support one's life) outside the household in the context of visits. In this regard, three studies should be mentioned. The first, by Cave and Koloto (2015), explores visits and occasional seasonal work among Tongans to New Zealand, but under a formal work scheme developed by both governments. The second, by King et al. (2006, 2014), remarks on the case of Albanian (grand)parents taking casual paid work (e.g., cleaning, care work, light construction or repairs) during long-term visits to their descendants in Greece, Italy and the United States. The third, by Treas (2008), briefly alludes to parent visitors' engagement in casual jobs while in the United States. Crucially, none of these studies specifically or extensively addresses the casual paid work carried out by older parents during visits to family abroad and the affective meaning of these activities.

Similarly, the role of nonmigrant visits under (im)mobility regimes remains insufficiently conceptualized in the literature. In contexts where part of the family is unable to travel across borders because of their undocumented status abroad, mobilities, including visits from nonmigrant kin, can become a key pillar of transnational family life and proximate care provision (Dossa & Coe, 2017; Merla et al., 2020; Svašek, 2008). Nonmigrant visits ensure physical and emotional proximity, foster intergenerational exchange and support transnational livelihoods. While politics of (im)mobility, unjust migration regimes and unequal rights to (international) mobility have been thoroughly conceptualized (e.g., Collyer & King, 2015; Sheller, 2018), there is much insight to be gained from considering such phenomena from a 'visits' vantage point. On this subject, authors have appositely noted that visits abroad require economic resources (e.g., paying for trips to the consulate, visa application fees, the trip abroad, travel health insurance), good or decent health to travel and legal permission to enter and stay in the destination country for a specific period of time (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2020; Zhou, 2018).

How, then, can practices of paid work during extended visits abroad develop in connection with forms of affective care? The literature on emotion and affect, migration and transnational families, and paid work provides useful insight in this regard. Boccagni and Baldassar (2015) notably argue for an integrated analysis of instrumental (i.e., economically driven) and emotional dimensions in migrant life. Their call for these dimensions to be analysed as complementary

rather than polar opposites precisely denotes the relevance of further examining the intersections between affective and financial dimensions. From this standpoint, material and affective come into contact and develop through processes of circulation, immobility, dis-embodiment and dis-embeddedness. Moreover, the affective and material play out at multiple scales—the self, the couple, the (transnational) family—and convey a collective understanding of security and well-being where care for oneself and care for others are deeply intertwined and generate new forms of affective relationships, trust and mutual reliance (Bastia et al., 2021; Sampaio, 2020).

Work as affective care thus encompasses both physical and affective engagement with individuals' surroundings to respond to material and nonmaterial needs. This concept illustrates a context where work strengthens family bonds, fortifies relationships and acts as forms of emotional bonding and mutual support for migrants and nonmigrant visitors. In this sense, then, the affective meanings contained in work practices can be viewed as interstitial, acting almost as a familial glue that ties together bodies and places in transnational space and links micro and macro levels of social reality (e.g., individuals, transnational families, visa and border regimes).

Given the focus on an affective dimension of paid work, my argument of work as affective care shares certain affinities with Arlie Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour¹ and some of the literature that followed from it, especially in regards to how physical and emotional forms of labour interweave. In this respect, the core ideas underpinning the concept of emotional labour relate to how organizations and social structures utilize workers' emotional labour and how workers manage and regulate their emotions in the workplace. The specificity of paid work as affective care documented in this article is, on the other hand, that material and nonmaterial affective goals organically appear (i.e., they are not a requirement of the job) as profoundly interconnected and develop in close connection with each other. Crucially, the affective dimension of paid work as care is valued *positively* (i.e., not as a burden) and enacted in relation to the family, not in connection with an organization or boss. While this is without a doubt a positive framing, it is also important to note, as the literature on transnational families and visits clearly reveals, that the experiences of migrants and their families are far from unitary but rather complex, nuanced and dynamic.

Short-term casual paid work abroad thus displays a financial *and*, significantly, an affective meaning. As Thai (2014, p. 192) observes in his ethnography of money circulation among low-income Vietnamese transnational families, 'money is not solely a financial affair'. Similarly, work on migration and debt has shown that debt should be understood as 'a financial, social, moral and emotional relation' (Datta & Aznar, 2019, p. 301) that transcends spatial (physical) and temporal borders. These translocal circulations show that emotional nurturing and economic sustenance are not independent and that particular forms of care and caring are expressed in practical and financial terms (Mckay, 2007). From this standpoint, the money earned through migration and mobility trajectories can be considered 'special money' (Zelizer, 1997) and a way of 'showing' and 'sharing feeling' (Mckay, 2007), for it is utilized as an instrument of care and bonding, particularly vital in contexts where individuals have limited opportunities to spend time together due to structures of (im)mobility. Paid work and resulting monetary circulations across borders thus reveal financial and emotional needs as co-evolving and mutually constitutive.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The city of Governador Valadares, located in the inland state of Minas Gerais in southeastern Brazil, has a long-standing history of emigration to the United States. These transnational links took shape in the late 1970s and 1980s during economic downturn in Brazil and have remained robust until today, making Governador Valadares a particularly productive site to observe migration and transnational family dynamics (see also Jorgensen et al., 2021). Migration from this city is characterized by high levels of irregularity, with significant numbers of young, economically active adults (20–40 years old) braving dangerous crossings through the Mexico–United States border (Siqueira, 2018). In the United States, Brazilian immigration and settlement have been particularly significant in the Greater Boston area, where Portuguese-speaking networks have been in place for decades. Brazilian migrants typically find employment in flexible and largely informal work niches such as housekeeping, daycare, babysitting and the restaurant sector

(Martes, 2011). According to the Migration Policy Institute's most recent data, 433,500 Brazilians lived in the United States as of 2019 (Migration Policy Institute—MPI, 2019). Among these, the same source estimated that 178,000 had an unauthorized status (Migration Policy Institute—MPI, 2019)².

For the undocumented migrant offspring, it is common to be unable to travel to Brazil for long periods, which results in prolonged family separation. In these cases, and when possible, the parents in Brazil assume the responsibility of travelling to the United States if granted a visitor visa ('tourist' visa), but this is not an easy undertaking. The parents described the visa application in Brazil as a lengthy, costly and arduous process. This involved long coach journeys to the main Brazilian cities where United States consulates are located. They also had to endure the uncertainty of the decision process and the added burden of multiple re-applications in the cases of rejection. In order to be granted a visitor visa, which allows for a stay of up to 6 months³, the research participants had to provide detailed evidence of their assets in Brazil, namely owned properties and/or savings, proof of pension (if applicable), as well as any other local obligations that indicated no intention to overstay their visitor ('tourist') visa in the United States. The visa application process also included an interview with a consular officer. Depending on the applicant's age, the purchase of travel health insurance for senior citizens is required. Notwithstanding the multiple logistic and administrative challenges faced, older parents were generally more likely to be granted a visitor visa to the United States than their adult, working-age children in Brazil.

In Brazil, despite growing recognition of the importance of safeguarding senior citizens' economic rights and welfare (see also Neumann & Albert, 2018), state support in later life often remains insufficient. It is thus common for older adults in lower-income households to try to stay economically active for as long as possible in order to generate additional savings (Leibing, 2005; for a parallel in South America, see Bastia et al., 2021). Simultaneously, studies also indicate that opportunities for keeping active in the Brazilian labour market later in life are unevenly concentrated among those with better qualifications (Wajzman et al., 2004). This backdrop helps elucidate why older parents visiting family members in the United States are keen to engage in short-term casual paid work to make supplementary earnings that can secure them and their households' more comfortable livelihoods.

METHODS AND DATA

In this article, I draw on research conducted with Brazilian transnational families in 2019. The research started in Brazil, in the city of Governador Valadares, where I interviewed and accompanied the lives of parents whose offspring had emigrated to the United States. Drawing on connections established locally, I then continued the research in the Boston area, where I spoke with Brazilian immigrants, in some cases the adult children of the older parents I had interviewed in Brazil. The group included 33 older parents in Governador Valadares, Brazil and 38 adult children in the Greater Boston area, United States. Both groups were composed primarily of women, followed by men (25 women and 8 men in Brazil, and 28 women and 10 men in the United States). The interviewees in Brazil were 58 years old and above (average age of 71 years old). The offspring in the United States were 43 years old on average, and the large majority had established families abroad.

The research participants were reached through shared networks and snowballing and the interviewing process developed over time. This allowed for building trusting relationships where the participants felt at ease and comfortable sharing their life stories, including addressing sensitive topics such as financial difficulties, health problems or the legal challenges faced by their adult offspring abroad. The interviewing process followed a life narrative approach that facilitated chronologically and spatially situated understandings of the interviewees' accounts and their subjectively formed representations of social life, migration history, and family reconfigurations across borders. This methodological approach also allowed for recollecting and temporally dissecting feelings, attachments and relationships with others and the place in great detail (Andrews et al., 2006). The transnational families interviewed were generally from modest backgrounds, albeit most had experienced some degree of financial relief over time through the remittances sent by their adult children abroad. Existing assets and income, for instance, a retirement pension or owning a house or

some land, were crucial, as previously noted, in the visa application process because they signalled that the applicants had no intention to overstay their visa in the United States.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim (in Portuguese), coded, and analysed according to main themes using a qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 11). Relevant quotes were translated into English by the author. The analysis presented in this article focuses on the research participants who vividly described their visits abroad and shared in detail their experiences of making earnings while visiting their children and grandchildren. While it is not uncommon for Brazilian (grand)parents to take advantage of their visits abroad to see family and engage in short-term casual paid work, not all participants felt comfortable sharing details about what can otherwise be construed as illegal work. To protect their identity, pseudonyms are used throughout.

The writing process was conducted in a way that endeavoured to capture the participants' detailed accounts of casual paid work abroad and their narrated affective meanings, and it developed dialectically between existing conceptual debates and the empirical material collected. For matters of clarity and presentation, the analysis and discussion are structured around four case studies, including two parent-adult children dyads, each capturing key thematic threads relating to work and affect and related circulations.

WORK AS AFFECTIVE CARE: VISITING PARENTS TO THE UNITED STATES AND THEIR EARNINGS ABROAD

In this section, I discuss work as affective care through the accounts and experiences of nonmigrant Brazilian older parent visitors and their adult children in the United States. Accounts about the parents' visits abroad surfaced naturally during the interviews, as they shared their experiences of travelling and staying with their families abroad. They talked, for example, about their leisure trips with children and grandchildren, their caring roles within the household, and their experiences of paid work and making earnings abroad. Drawing on findings regarding the latter, I enquired further into these themes during my fieldwork in the United States, where I endeavoured to understand such experiences of paid work from the vantage point of the offspring abroad. In the following, I focus on the narratives and thick descriptions of (older) parents and adult children as they reflect on and share their experiences, thoughts and hopes regarding short-term paid work in the context of visits abroad.

Affective and monetary meanings of visits abroad

Parents described their visits abroad, particularly longer ones of several months, as eagerly awaited trips where emotional and material objectives and aspirations appeared as profoundly interconnected, co-produced and co-evolving dimensions. Júlia, 80 years old, narrated this experience of short-term casual work during her visits abroad to see her daughter in detail.

She quickly rearranged her small living room as we sat down at a round dining table. She told me that her eldest daughter had left for the United States many years ago to help support the family. For a family of modest means, life became even more challenging when Júlia's son had an accident that permanently incapacitated him. In the hope of achieving a better future for herself and her family, Bárbara, Júlia's daughter, attempted a dangerous crossing into the United States through Mexico. Despite living abroad for almost 20 years, Bárbara was still undocumented and was therefore unable to travel to see family in Brazil. Júlia appeared visibly distressed as she relayed her permanent worries about her daughter who remained undocumented, lived in a small studio apartment, and never got married or had children. Like many Brazilian migrant women in the United States, Bárbara worked as a housekeeper. Júlia was concerned that her daughter was always 'go, go, go', did not have a proper lunch break, and noted that American bosses were not always kind: 'I live in fear for her, she works too much, it's a difficult life.'

Júlia and Bárbara's experience of prolonged separation was far from exceptional among the participants. It was Bárbara's involuntary immobility abroad that encouraged her mother's transnational mobility. Since Júlia was able to get a visitor visa, she periodically travelled to visit her daughter, check up on her and spend time together. She usually stayed for 2 or 3 months. While abroad, Júlia rapidly realized that she could also take advantage of her time to take on small casual jobs that allowed additional earnings for herself and her family in Brazil. At the same time, this also relieved her daughter from obligations towards family, namely the responsibility to pay for her brother's physiotherapy. Instead of 'sitting at home' during the day waiting for her daughter, Júlia, now 80 years old, started joining Bárbara in her cleaning schedules, which, in turn, allowed her daughter to take on more homes and thus make greater earnings. Sometimes, she also babysat for her daughter's (Brazilian) neighbours. She relayed:

The last time I went to visit my daughter in the United States, I stayed for two months, but I wanted to stay longer. I always want to stay longer. It's difficult because my son here needs my help. But the longer I can stay, the more I can bring back too.

[...]

The money I make there is worth more. I can afford better physiotherapy for my son, so that my daughter doesn't have to worry too much. I can make savings for food, medicines, anything we need to fix around the house.

Júlia's account captures both the emotional and monetary meanings attached to visits abroad. On the one hand, the possibility of spending time with geographically distant children and, on the other, the ability to make additional earnings. Another interesting element in this excerpt is the assertion that 'United States money' is 'worth more' (than the Brazilian real). Not only is this a factual statement, but it is also a culturally laden one. The money Júlia is able to make abroad can be construed as 'special money' (Zelizer, 1997) because it is imbued with cultural and affective meanings. Money appears as an object of feeling and a container of emotions that are both embodied and spatially circulating. While emotions 'may retain a distinctive material basis' (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015, p. 75), they are inherently socially and culturally situated and context dependent. In this sense, different forms of hope, belief and aspiration are constituted, displayed and managed across multiple spatial and temporal points of reference. Visiting parents' paid work and its financial upshot was thus enacted as an instrument of affective care over time and across locales.

Similar material, but also social, cultural and affective meanings of work and money were present in other parents' accounts. For Josiane, 65 years old, already retired from her job as a janitor, travelling abroad to visit her adult children and grandchildren was described as a vital part of her life. After multiple tries, she was finally granted a visitor ('tourist') visa to the United States. Since then, she travelled every two years and, more recently, every year if possible. She usually stayed abroad for several months, particularly if she travelled alone since her husband usually preferred shorter stays. Mother of seven, most of her children had emigrated to the United States over the years, and some remained undocumented abroad. They had started their own families, and Josiane also had many grandchildren. For these reasons, her visits abroad were a key constituent of transnational familyhood and maintaining close ties despite the distance.

Josiane described how, during her longer stays, she rapidly felt restless at home while everyone else was out at work or school. Thus, she became keen on taking on small paid jobs, such as babysitting or cleaning, that allowed her to keep busy during the day and make some savings for herself. She proactively searched for those opportunities by making acquaintances in the neighbourhood and strengthening ties with other Brazilian families living near her daughter. She finally found a job as a babysitter for a Brazilian neighbour, and she also diligently cooked and cleaned for the family:

And so, I worked 5 months in this lady's home, looking after her baby ... well, I would do everything: cleaning, cooking, ironing, everything. We agreed on an amount and they paid me double. So, then I bought the car you saw downstairs, it still smells brand new! I had the dream of buying a car, so I worked hard, and I bought it. It's good for us to go after a dream, accomplish something. With money from here, it would have taken me a long time before I could afford a car.

Josiane's narrative excerpt captures a deep sense of contentment and self-realisation. Her sense of accomplishment and the value she places on work as a source of self-worth and continued sense of purpose in *later life* were common among the participants. At the same time, consumerist practices and the ability to afford purchases with one's own financial resources was deeply enabling and a source of satisfaction and self-respect (Sampaio, 2022).

The social meaning attached to Josiane's work and the money earned abroad, which eventually allowed her to purchase a car back home, is crucial to understanding this. Akin to Júlia's case, also in this account the *where, how, when* and *to what end* of this 'special' money and work lay at the very heart of the narrative. Josiane's story was filled with a sense of ability, agency, and ingeniousness, which was particularly significant given that this money was achieved during visits and as a mature-age, retired woman. In addition, the fact that such money circulation was a product of transnational family networks added personal, cultural and affective value to it. Money was depicted as more than just material or an affordance. It was described as a shared feeling in motion between different social spaces (Mckay, 2007). Such affective meanings took shape transnationally, across generations, over time, and as embodied and spatially embedded dimensions. Work as affective care thus gained new meanings across borders and in relation to varying configurations of space, time and kinship. Money and other transnational object circulations remind us that 'objects of emotion take shape as effects of circulation' and 'emotions are not simply located in the individual, but move between bodies' (and here I add, places and borders) (Ahmed, 2004, p. 10).

Work during visits and everyday routines and affects

The participants described casual paid jobs during visits abroad as deeply embedded in everyday routines and affects. This involved ordinary activities such as trips to work, acts of cooking and eating together, watching TV with family and playing with grandchildren. Besides these nurturing family routines, visiting parents also talked about working alongside their offspring or in the vicinity of their homes. Fernanda, 57 years old, and her daughter Thais's experience attests to this continued entanglement between work and affect through daily family routines.

Fernanda's visits, typically once a year, were crucial moments of reconnection with her daughter, son-in-law and two school-age grandchildren. Despite being able to regularize her situation abroad after several years of living undocumented, Thais preferred that her mother come to visit instead of the family travelling to Brazil. Fernanda, who worked informally selling clothes and handbags in Brazil, described her visits abroad, usually 1–3 months, for the affective value they afforded her and her transnational family. At the same time, she also saw a gleam of opportunity for making casual earnings. She described this enthusiastically when we met in her home one evening:

I said to people 'look, if I'm going there [to the United States] I need to get some money to pay for the handbags I am bringing back'. So, then I took some dish towels to sell there. Embroidered dish towels... so her [her daughter's] clients [at the nail salon] would arrive and I would show, and everybody bought some. If I'm going abroad, I'm going to do business (laughs). My son-in-law was like 'you're making more money than I do' (laughs). Clients arriving, me working, sitting on a chair 'people, look at my dish towels here'...

As the quote above exemplifies, Fernanda saw her visits abroad as trips with multiple purposes. She spent time and caught up with her daughter at the nail salon where she worked, mainly frequented by other Brazilian women. At the

same time, she also made some money by selling decorated dish towels that she sewed herself. Work appears here as material and financial but also as affective and symbolic. If, on the one hand, it generates earnings and monetary circulation, on the other, it creates an opportunity to spend time together and inhabit the offspring's social world abroad. A comparable idea was articulated by Thais when I visited her in her home in the United States.

[I tell her] 'Mother, there you come'... She's always business-minded (laughs). But she also spends her time, talks to people in the salon. We go and come back together and then pick up the kids from school on the way home.

In her narrative, Thais described her mother's work almost metaphorically. For Thais, her mother's selling activities primarily symbolized a sense of activity and remaining engaged and resourceful. More than financial gain, work is depicted as a *feeling*. Indeed, although Fernanda made some earnings, Thais took the business side lightly and focused mainly on the affective dimension of spending time together rather than the monetary value of Fernanda's selling activities. Thais emphasized the everyday routines to and from work, the mundane exchanges in the nail salon, and interactions with the grandchildren, which mostly took place during Fernanda's visits. Work held a symbolic significance, where financial gain was subsumed by the everyday, ordinary exchanges and their affective value. It is also interesting to observe that the same events are perceived and conveyed in slightly different ways between mother and daughter, which shows that shared moments and experiences do not necessarily generate the exact same feeling for those who partake (Ahmed, 2004).

While most parents and adult children, such as Fernanda and Thais, described these visits in a rather positive, beneficial and affectionate way, this is not to say that tensions within the household did not occur. Indeed, other studies have documented the tensions and ambivalent feelings that can ensue in transnational families, noting that 'although transnational care exchanges are expressions of obligations, trust and love among family members, they are also characterized by tensions and conflicts' (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2020, p. 296).

As the discussion thus far shows, opportunities for short-term casual paid work during visits abroad were typically available to women. This gender component was explained by the kind of informal jobs available, wherein the mothers could more seamlessly join their daughters' cleaning schedules or find casual babysitting jobs through trusted networks. From that perspective, Gustavo was a less common but equally insightful case. Gustavo, 58 years old, had been unemployed for a couple of years when we met for lunch at his home, joined by his wife and youngest son. He himself had been a migrant in the United States, but after several years undocumented, he and his wife decided to return to Brazil. His eldest son, born in the United States, was a U.S. citizen. Despite the financial insecurity the family encountered in Brazil and still with a teenage son to provide for, Gustavo did not consider emigrating at this stage of his life. Instead, he took advantage of the extended visits to his son in the United States to take on short-term jobs that helped compensate for the lack of income for the remainder of the year.

I know the United States well, we used to live in the Boston area as well. I know the restaurant, I still have contacts there. [...] The good thing about the United States is that you work hard, but you can also make really good money.

While abroad, Gustavo worked in a restaurant kitchen, taking on various food preparation tasks. Because this was a familiar job to him, he quickly got into a work routine. Simultaneously, the time abroad was also a period to reconnect with his eldest son, Henrique, who had left for the United States in search of better life opportunities. In Henrique's flat, which he shared with a friend, Gustavo slept on the sofa, but he told me he did not mind: 'it's nice to share the same routine, have breakfast together, just like back home.' Henrique, whom I met in his flat in the Boston area, conveyed the same experience, stressing the emotional and grounding significance of family visits. He talked about feeling homesick sometimes and explained that his father's extended visits helped him keep focused and motivated. As the only U.S. citizen in his family, Henrique felt an additional responsibility to support his family in whatever way

possible. The material opportunities and achievements he had attained in the United States, ambivalently intersected with 'complex dynamics of obligation, longing and connection' (Mckay, 2007, pp. 170–71). Reflecting on his father's visits, Henrique emphasized the time spent together and the bonding nature of everyday activities such as cooking, watching sports, or going out for a beer. Yet, he also noted that balancing work and leisure, particularly within the limited timeframe of visits, was difficult at times.

So I was telling my mates at the restaurant that my father arrives on Wednesday. One of the guys said: 'great, so he starts on Thursday', and I go: 'He starts on Monday, not on Thursday. Let me enjoy my father a little bit!'

Financial (money-oriented activities) and affective goals (physical proximity, sharing routines, or checking up on each other) were invariably presented as deeply interwoven, co-produced and co-evolving dimensions in transnational family life. Work as affective care appeared imagined, experienced and realized as a collective, intergenerational family effort. Such embodiments of affective dimensions of work attest to how emotions permeate transnational family life across borders, showing that families put considerable time and energy into managing and regulating feelings such as loneliness, obligation and mutual support (Svašek, 2008).

CONCLUSION

Focusing on nonmigrant visitors' experiences of paid work abroad is a productive entry point for thinking about and further conceptualizing the diversity of practices that can occur during (extended) visits to friends and relatives. Drawing on the experiences of Brazilian older parents taking on casual paid jobs while visiting their adult offspring in the United States and the affective meaning of these practices, this article has endeavoured to advance debates on transnational family life and ageing (Baldassar et al., 2007; Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015; Nedelcu & Wyss, 2020). It did so by showing financial and affective goals in migrant and transnational life as deeply interconnected and co-evolving elements that can encourage, reconfigure and halt transnational mobilities. Importantly, this article also demonstrates that those crossings are not always harmonious and material and affective needs can also be experienced differently and prove difficult to reconcile.

Extended visits abroad allow for a broader range of activities and roles to develop. Expressing feeling 'restless' at home or unwilling to 'sit at home all day' while the family was out at work or school, older parents used their social and cultural capital and networks to find short-term casual paid jobs, such as cleaning, babysitting or kitchen work. This was often done alongside the adult children, which also allowed for strengthening family ties. An analysis of visits abroad thus reveals a financial dimension to care where paid work acts as a social instrument that brings the transnational family together. Work as affective care takes shape relationally and involves thoughts and permanent reassessments that encompass more than one place and multiple generations. Furthermore, it materializes through the movement of bodies and objects (e.g., 'special' or 'affective' money) (Mckay, 2007; Zelizer, 1997), and the circulation of feelings, emotions and life aspirations.

Paid work as affective care underscores three key dimensions that such practice addresses: (1) the ability to pay for the trips abroad and make additional savings; (2) the capacity to relieve the offspring abroad from financial responsibilities towards older generations and other family members in the country of origin and (3) the possibility of spending time together and bonding with geographically distant, and sometimes legally stranded, offspring. These findings suggest new avenues to conceptualize Janta et al.'s (2015) explanatory framework for analysing diverse practices within VFR mobilities. Adding to the authors' discussion of social relationships, care provision, identities and roots, upholding of territorial rights, and tourism, it is proposed to include *paid work* as a practice that can be enacted during transnational visits.

A second contribution this article makes concerns the temporal dimension of visits. For transnational families facing lengthened periods of separation due to stringent migration regimes, extended visits and work practices during those prolonged stays are constituted across borders and contingent upon broader structures of (im)mobility. While not always a topic overtly discussed, parents' visits contain clear temporal demarcations (established by their visitor visa) that delimit the temporal horizons (Amrith, 2021) of their transnational journeys and related affective and material aspirations abroad. Moreover, the variable temporal range and multiple purposes of these extended visits, which can in practice overlap with other categories of transnational mobility (e.g., seasonal work and other schemes of temporary and circular migration), call for more research on the intersections, intricacies and inadequacies inherent in these migration categories.

Finally, the experiences discussed in this article also reveal a clear gender component, with women generally finding it easier to take on casual jobs during visits. This was the case mainly for two reasons: the still predominantly gendered nature of the short-term jobs available (e.g., cleaning, babysitting), and their propensity to spend longer periods with family abroad (unlike their husbands). Importantly, however, it is not the article's intention to reproduce linear and often taken-for-granted associations between women and emotions, which should remain open to questioning and challenge. By shedding light on paid work as an instrument of affective care, this article hopes to foster more discussions on the interconnections between the affective and material in transnational family life.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The sharing of this ethnographic data in a public repository compromises ethical standards.

ENDNOTES

¹ Hochschild's original conceptualization of emotional labour refers to jobs that require not only physical labour but also, essentially, an ability to manage and produce a feeling (e.g., a waiter being more pleasant, or a bill collector being more punitive than habitually). Since its inception, the concept of emotional labour has become more and more broadly used both in the realm of paid and unpaid labour (for a review see Wharton, 2009).

² Data on Brazilian undocumented migrants in the United States tend to vary significantly according to the source (e.g., the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates significantly higher numbers than the American Community Survey).

³ A Brazilian visitor visa to the United States is usually valid for 10 years and allows for multiple entries. However, the visa validity may vary according to the documents provided and the interview at the consulate.

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