

Love Migration: Narratives and Materialities of Mobile Couple Relationships

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Abstract

Taking love as the analytical focus on mobile couple relationships, in this thesis I present a novel conceptualisation of migrant couples as 'love migrants'. Focusing analytically on love shows that migrating becomes meaningful as an act of love and as a process through which love migrants distinguish their relationships from non-mobile couple relationships. Giving a central place to love in my research demonstrates that love migrant couples draw on embodied knowledges and material belongings to understand their feelings and experiences of relationships.

My methodological approach is informed by feminist perspectives and gives primacy to participant voices. I use creative methods in which narrative interviewing is accompanied by a material approach where participants choose an object to talk about. This creates space for contemplation of emotional, tactile and non-verbal aspects.

The substantive chapters engage with negotiating migrating for love, materialities of love, and love migrant subjectivities. In Chapter 4, I show how migrating (or not) for love becomes a meaningful symbolic act and discuss the intricacies of how couples negotiate which partner will migrate and to where. I argue that the desire for day-to-day intimacy and touch is a central motivation for migration in love migrant lives. In Chapter 5, I argue that the objects chosen by couples indicate multiple and contingent understandings of love. I develop my argument that everyday touch and intimacy is important in love migrant lives through attention to the objects. In Chapter 6, I analyse how love migrant couples construct subjectivities through discourses of cosmopolitanism and argue that the objects chosen indicate a form of social capital related to love.

Overall, I argue that my perspective articulates an under-researched view on migration and allows insight into how couples experience and understand migration, adding complexity to existing frameworks. I aim to connect research on love with research on mobile couple relationships to explore the emotional side of couple relationships in mobility through the novel concept 'love migration'.

WORK NOT SUBMITTED ELSEWHERE FOR EXAMINATION

This thesis has not been previously submitted in whole or in part to this or any other University for any other degree.

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Chapter 1. Locating Love Migration and Love Migrants

Introduction

This thesis is about love, couple relationships and migration. It is an empirical study of the ways that couple love relationships are negotiated, enacted and experienced in and through migration. I examine the relationship between love and (im)mobility in migration to Europe, in a study informed by emotional geographies, migration research, and research on intimacy. The research relates to three broad themes: love, mobility, and materialities. The thesis is underpinned by work on the social construction of love, the embodied and material aspects of love, as well as research on couple relationships, heteronormativity and migration.

Working in several countries over more than a decade, I saw, lived and felt what it was to migrate for love. Friends and colleagues orchestrated employment to facilitate their relationships. The excitement of new relationships was intertwined with the adventure of travel and new beginnings, but equally with negotiating the mundanities of everyday life. It is difficult to assess the exact impact of my background on my research, and while this thesis is not my story, my experiences and observations of migration and love have informed my thinking and approach. And yet, when I tried to find academic accounts of love migration, they seemed absent from the literature. Instead, these stories were subsumed into research about economics, lifestyle, care, gender, marriage and sexuality. As such, the intimate experiences of love migrant couples were not visible.

I seek, in this thesis, to understand the emotional aspects of couple migration through attention to how love is mobilised in narratives of couple migration. I focus on love to interrogate what love does in these relationships. I examine how being a love migrant is the basis for the production of particular 'modes of being' (Noble, 2004) and how love is lived, felt and understood in love migrant couples' lives. Love is spatiotemporally specific and thus attention to the geopolitical and historical contexts which shape love for specific people in specific places and at specific times informs the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis (Tolia-Kelly, 2006). Following this, being in a couple relationship can be understood as a particular enactment of love which is embedded in a range of heteronormative practices and discourses and which has been associated with inequality (Jackson, 1999). Therefore, I am attentive to the

ways that love and the performance of couple relationships are embedded in complex entanglements of power and of heteronormativity in love migrants' narratives.

1.1 Couples

The couple relationship is prioritised as the most important intimate relationship in contemporary Western societies (Jamieson, 1999; Evans, 2003; Johnson, 2005; Budgeon, 2008; van Hooff, 2013; Walsh, 2018; Roseneil et al., 2020). The couple is entrenched in social and personal ideas about love, a concept which is socially and historically contingent and contested, but which is nonetheless a compelling social idea and force. The presence of the couple is so ubiquitous in contemporary Western society that, as Jenny van Hooff argues, 'being part of a couple is almost compulsory, with singleness largely regarded as failure' (2013, p. 149). This provides basis for the argument that critical engagement with couple relationships is a productive area for research.

In their account of the normativity of the couple, Roseneil et al. argue that the couple is tenacious and 'remains one of the most potent objects of normativity in contemporary European societies' (2020, p.3). They describe how feminist research has critiqued the normativity of the 'couple-form' (p.6) but argue that social science and mainstream discourse have not recognised the pervasiveness of, and privilege given to couples. Thus, being single, despite coming before being in a couple, becomes a 'deficit narrative' (DePaulo, 2023, p.391).

Others, such as Jamieson have also argued that intimate relationships are central to 'meaningful social life' (1998, p.1). Societal changes have positioned couple relationships, rather than family, as the key site of intimacy (Jamieson, 1998, p.136), but, where previously marriage was seen as central to personal life, there has also been a shift to different types of committed relationships which include cohabiting and sexual partnerships as well as non-cohabiting and celibate relationships (ibid.).

Despite the centrality of couple love and intimacy to contemporary life, both geography and migration studies have had a somewhat standoffish relationship with couple love relationships. As Katie Walsh has pointed out, '[t]he significance of intimacy in our everyday lives is not fully recognised by contemporary geographical scholarship' (2018, p.145). So, while there is an abundance of work on the family (Charsley, 2005; Baldassar, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Salazar Parreñas, 2008; Svašek, 2008; Salazar Parreñas, 2014; Baldassar, 2015; Vermot, 2015; Kara and Wrede, 2022), there is less on the emotional lives of couples.

In migration studies, couples have largely been the focus of research on highly skilled migration. Much literature on highly skilled migrant couples emphasises the economic and gendered contexts of these relationships but has not given sufficient attention to the emotional aspects of these relationships. When migrants' intimate lives have been researched, Walsh argues there has been more focus on 'contexts whereby global commodification of intimacy is more overt – in domestic work, sex work and cross-border marriages, especially' (2018, p.4) which has shown, for example, how power circulates in these situations. But, Walsh continues, in 'freely chosen' relationships migrant subjectivities are still shaped by power and global processes' (ibid.) and therefore need to be examined.

I examine how love is narrated as a central guiding principle in couples' migration. A focus on love as an embodied, relational concept provides a different perspective on how intimate life influences migration. I analyse how migration and love intertwine in these narrations to create emergent migrant subjectivities. Scrutinising couple migration through love sheds light on how couples create meaning in and through the love stories in their migration stories. I aim to understand the role of love in migrant couples' lives by analysing the significance couples give to love in their narratives of migration. I position love centrally in the analysis of migrant lives which highlights personal and social processes involved in how couples migrate. I bring literature on love and intimacy into dialogue with literature on couple migration.

1.2 Love Migration and its Conceptual Cognates

To further clarify the conceptual boundaries of love migration, in the following section, I outline some categories of migration which could also describe characteristics of the participants in this study. I consider youth migration, lifestyle migration and high skilled migration as well as considering LAT (living apart together) relationships, single migrants and marriage migration. I argue that it is productive to see love migration as an independent category because love migration reveals the motivation of migrant couples, shows that love is understood in varied ways and that love is enacted through migration.

1.2.1 Youth Migrants and Single Migrants

In their editorial to a special issue on youth mobility, Lulle and King (2019) point out the transition from childhood to adulthood is a varied trajectory involving back-and-forth movements between youth and adult. Establishing a couple relationship or 'reunit[ing] with a partner' (p. 165) was a life course event related to the transition to adulthood identified by León Himmelstine and King (2019) in their research on Spanish youth migration, suggesting similarities between youth migrants and love migrants. Overall, however, León Himmelstine and King determine that most youth migrants were economic migrants whose previous 'precarious jobs, unpaid internships, or long periods of unemployment drove their decision to migrate' (2019, p.165), and others were students. Moreover, while youth migration overlaps with some of the younger migrants in this study, age is not a useful demographic through which to identify love migrants because migrating for a relationship could relate to multiple life stages and ages.

A further distinction between youth migrants and love migrants is that many youth migrants are single and not in relationships. There is no requirement for love migrant couples to be married, therefore some may migrate as independent people while being a de facto couple. Research on younger, single female migrants by Meike Fechter suggests that they draw on discourses of adventure and social experiences above career enhancement (Fechter, 2008). Fechter describes women in their 'late twenties or early thirties' (2008, p.193), who seek work abroad and are happy to migrate as a single woman to gain international experience and enjoy an international lifestyle. Overall, she shows that economic gain is not drawn on as the main motivation for their migration, but being able to 'do good' (2008, p.199) in the host country is more compelling for these young women. Fechter also notes that their choices can impede the formation and maintenance of couple relationships. Research on the intimate lives of single migrants has been given greater attention by Katie Walsh. Her research on 'expatriate' migrants in Dubai has shown that migration can challenge the formation of intimate relationships by increasing the risks involved (Walsh, 2006a). Migration can also provide an alternative to couple relationships (Walsh, 2006a, 2007) with the temporary nature of (some) expatriate migration providing a liminal space for the performance of sexual relationships. However, the transient nature of relationships permitted by the migration can be equally dissatisfying. More explicit attention to the emotional experiences of single migrants has been given by Frohlick (2009) who explored European and North American women migrants who seek emotional

attachment and love relationships in the global South. Roca I Girona, Masdéu and Bodoque Puerta (2012), and Bodoque Puerta and Soronellas Masdéu (2010) concentrated on women who emigrate to Spain to be with their male Spanish partner and showed that their migration often entails increased dependency on their partners and a denial of their migrant status because of their intention to remain. However, these studies focus on outcomes and experiences in relation to the host country rather than the emotional processes of the couple.

1.2.2 Lifestyle Migration

A frequently cited definition of lifestyle migration is that it is 'a route to a better and more fulfilling way of life, especially in contrast to the one left behind' (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009, p.1). There has been much debate about what 'better' means, but perceived lifestyle and cost of living relative to the home country often factor into lifestyle migrants' motivations to migrate. The focus of this study is to take couple love relationships as the main motivating factor in the migration, and this focus provides the main distinction between lifestyle and love migration. While distinct in the motivations, lifestyle migration 'offers a way of thinking about migration – in particular, about what migration means to some migrants' (Benson and O'Reilly, 2016, p.2), which is an aim that I share in examining love migration; therefore, love migration has a similar analytical approach.

Benson and O'Reilly also explain that lifestyle migration is part of a process of identity making (2016, p.22) related to the relative privilege of lifestyle migrants. Huete et al. (2013) convincingly argue that lifestyle migration is used as a proxy for nationalities, meaning that some migrants are (mis)categorised as lifestyle migrants because of their nationality when being described as economic migrants would be more accurate. Their critique resonates with the literature that has made explicit the way that part of the privilege lifestyle migrants experience and perform is through whiteness (Fechter and Walsh, 2010; Walsh, 2012; Benson, 2013b). Other critiques have suggested that lack of attention to the economic factors (Huete et al., 2013; Hayes, 2014) in favour of the cultural significance and imaginaries associated with the destinations of lifestyle migration has skewed our understanding of this migratory flow. Hayes (2014), for example, pointed out that the favourable cost of living was the most compelling reason for American migrants to relocate to Ecuador. As such, the agency they exerted over

their migrations was structured by social and economic inequality in the American context (2014, p.1966).

As love can be connected to the emergence of certain subjectivities (Giddens, 1992; Faier, 2007, 2009; Langhamer, 2013, 2015, 2025), love migration could also be seen as a site through which subjectivities are crafted in dialectical relation to migration. In cases where love migrants enjoy relative privilege, as many, though not all, in this study do, they are perhaps able to 'approach migration as a form of consumption in contrast to the production orientation attributed to most other migration flows' (Benson and O'Reilly, 2016, p. 22). In this study, I place love at the centre while remaining attentive to social contexts which both constrain and provide opportunity, providing a grounded account of migrant lives in specific contexts.

1.2.3 Skilled, Mobile Professionals

Most of the participants in my research were educated to tertiary level, and many were or had recently been engaged in skilled employment. It is, therefore, appropriate to consider them as skilled migrants because educational attainment can be used as a measure of 'skill' (Iredale, 2005, 2008; Kōu et al., 2015; Boucher, 2020), despite definitions of skill in the context of migration being problematic (Kofman, 2000). I use educational attainment here as an indicator of a global social grouping into which most (but not all) of the participants can be placed. Further, while some love migrants changed jobs or 'de-skilled' because of their migration, either temporarily or permanently, many worked in middle-class professions, which would also align them with highly skilled migrants.

Skilled migrants can encompass varied social groups. My participants are less like the elite migrants (e.g. Beaverstock, 2005, 2009) or the detached cosmopolitans (e.g. Hannerz, 1996) depicted in some research and have more in common with ordinary and 'middling migrants' described by Conradson and Latham (2005, p. 290). That is, in terms of their country of origin, they are 'middling' in both socio-economic and class status (ibid.). Conradson and Latham point out that middling migrants are defined 'as much by what [migration] offers them in lifestyle and personal experience terms as by any narrow economic calculus' (ibid.), thus presenting a further argument for looking beyond economic factors when considering their migrations.

Three couples among the participants in my research organised their migration through intracompany transfer and could otherwise have been considered as 'expatriate' migrants (e.g. Willis and Yeoh, 2002; Leonard, 2010a). As Leonard has pointed out 'many skilled labour migrants are *also* seeking more than economic return alone' (2010a, p.2 emphasis in original) and suggests a need for more research into what they are looking for beyond financial gain. I address this by examining how love shapes couple migration. Literature on the spouses of professional migrants has addressed couple migration often through attention to the role and experiences of the so-called 'trailing spouse' (e.g. Coles and Fechter, 2008). This literature has not sought to directly explore the role of love in the couple relationships. My research provides a different perspective by looking at the couple relationship and the role which love has in couple migration, allowing relationships which could otherwise be viewed through conceptualisations of a 'lead' migrant and accompanying spouse to be seen in different terms and, importantly, in ways which are meaningful to the migrant couple.

1.2.4 Living-Apart-Together Couples

Couples in relationships but who do not cohabit have been categorised as 'living apart together' or LAT (Levin and Trost, 1999; Levin, 2004; Duncan and Phillips, 2010; Duncan et al., 2013). There are definitional complications relating to the degree of commitment of living apart together relationships and much discussion about the extent to which living apart together indicates social change (Levin, 2004; Roseneil, 2006; Weeks, 2007; Duncan and Phillips, 2010; Duncan et al., 2013). Furthermore, living alone is still often equated to not being in a couple relationship (Roseneil, 2006; Duncan et al., 2013). Reasons for LAT include not feeling ready to cohabit (Duncan and Phillips, 2010), waiting to get married, responsibilities to other family members, not being able to afford to live together or employment location preventing relocation (Duncan et al., 2013). LAT presents a continuum of choice and constraint where some couples actively choose to live apart to move beyond normative ideas about couple relationships, although Duncan et al. tell us that 'As many as two thirds of respondents said they 'definitely' or 'probably' would like to live with their partner in the future' (2013, p. 325), suggesting a substantial number of LATs do not do it through choice.

Love migration relationships may involve periods of LAT, particularly when partners are from and/ or live in different countries. This period of living apart is not the focus of the study

of love migration, as the focus is on the decision to migrate and the meanings mobile couples afford this decision. Therefore, most love migrant couples will likely have seen any periods of LAT as a constraint on their relationship which migration sought to overcome. Notwithstanding, research on LAT relationships provides an interesting comparative framework because it shows that not cohabiting, while perhaps not a new norm, is socially acceptable and thus provokes further questioning of why love migrant couples do choose to migrate.

1.2.5 Marriage Migration

While love migration is not defined through marriage and includes couple love relationships in different forms, I briefly outline here research on migration and marriage because it clarifies the conceptual boundaries of love migration. Qualitative research on the role of love in marriage migration has explored how love is interpreted by immigration regimes (D'Aoust, 2013; Pananakhonsab, 2019; Hoogenraad, 2021; Pellander, 2021). Drawing attention to connections between love, mobility and the sovereignty of the state, this research has demonstrated that love is central to the management of migration in border administration; love, or how love is interpreted by immigration officials, as well as what kinds of couple love relationships are deemed acceptable in certain migration systems, affords mobility to some while denying it to others.

Analysing how income can be used to 'prove emotional attachment' in couple immigration to Finland, Pellander (2021, p.465) demonstrates that assumptions about gender and culture play an important role in whether relationships are determined to be valid. Her detailed research shows how low income was mobilised to demonstrate emotional connections because financially supporting one's partner was seen by officials as an indication of emotional connection. However, this seemed to be gendered with only a male partner being able to provide for female partner as 'there were no cases in which a steady income and full-time work was claimed to make a good wife or mother' (p. 473). Pellander's research pinpoints how normative gender roles in the intimate sphere are tied to interpretations of valid relationships.

Pananakhonsab (2019) examines Thai women's narratives of love in relation to the processes of immigration regulations. She argues that the rules relating to marriage migration in Australia are based on opposing ideas about love and intimacy which she argues are the idea of 'love, pure relationships and free choice by two individuals' (p. 91) and 'practical intimacy

[...] built and sustained through practical actions', highlighting the contradictions inherent in the regulatory framework. She also points out that how couples feel is not considered and migration regulation prioritises 'material expressions' of love as indicators of the validity of a relationship. Her research convincingly shows that, in processes of immigration for marriage, emotions and 'instrumental action' in relationships are complexly combined.

These studies reveal how immigration regimes 'read' relationships and interpret their validity through normative understandings, showing how relationships are shaped by immigration processes. Lack of attention to emotions shows that immigration regimes are not focused on love, only on what can be interpreted as love, suggesting that it is the state identity and conforming to certain relationship norms which is of paramount importance. This body of work has demonstrated how love operates vis-à-vis state actors and institutions and has established love's importance in relation to mobility. Drawing on this body of research also helps to clarify my research aim of exploring how normative ideas about couple relationships and how love is performed in mobility circulate between the partners, rather than in relation to the state as love migrant couples do not need to be married and can migrate as independent people.

To sum up, love migration, while similar to other categories of migration and relationships, is not fully captured by any one of them. The imbrications that love migration has with these categories help to define the boundaries of this concept analytically, bringing into focus the importance of this novel conceptual framework.

1.3 Defining Love Migration and Love Migrants

I define love migration as migration which is primarily motivated and undertaken for the pursuit of a couple love relationship. Love migrants are, therefore, people who identify love as their own or their partner's primary motivation for migration. I see the migration as central to both partner's lives even if only one partner relocated. Therefore, I define love migrant couples as those who are involved in a relationship where both or one partner has migrated. This reflects my understanding of love as co-constructed, relational and embodied (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b; Smart, 2007; Langhamer, 2013). Love migration is a distinct way of viewing couple migration because mobile couples self-identify with love as the primary impetus for the

migration. Further, love is the analytical focus which places mobile couples' love lives at the centre of the research.

1.4 Research Aim and Questions

My principal research aim is to critically examine 'love migration'. I aim to foreground love conceptually and empirically in order to examine love migrant subjectivities through the narratives of couples who self-identify as love migrants in Brussels, London and Barcelona. From the broader aim of examining love migrant subjectivities, the following research questions emerge:

- How are the spatialities of love narrated by migrant couples?
- How are love migrant couples' understandings and experiences of love migration informed by social discourses of love and heteronormativity?
- How do couples narrate couple love and their embodied love relationships through chosen objects?
- What can be learnt about couple migration through a focus on love and love migrant subjectivities?
- How, and to what extent, is love migration a productive and distinct conceptual framework that might help us to nuance existing understanding of couple migration?

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

In the next chapter (Chapter two), I begin by contextualising research on love in relation to wider research on emotions and perspectives on intimacy. I then engage with social stories about love and consider the extent to which these inform our understandings of love.

Following the discussion of the role of discourse in social understandings of love, I argue for a more embodied approach (with language understood as embodied) to provide a more complex appreciation of how we understand and experience love. I develop the embodied perspective through an examination of literatures which look at practices of love and intimacy. I also

engage with existing research on highly skilled migrant couples and unpack some of the heteronormative assumptions in my research, arguing that researching love and researching migrant couples are not inherently synonymous. Finally, I engage with literature on materialities to explore the embodied and material aspects of love. Highlighting the material and embodied aspects of love shows the importance of understanding love as not only a discursive practice, but through felt and material processes.

In Chapter three I provide a detailed discussion of the methodology. I engage with literatures about creative and embodied methodologies, particularly those which use non-verbal ways of eliciting material. These literatures underpin a central argument in my thesis, namely that love is embodied and not always fully accessible through discursive practices. I move on to considering the use of objects as interview tools. I engage with debates about non-verbal methods of elicitation, and the usefulness of objects for getting at embodied emotional experiences. I also discuss narrative research in relation to the methodological approach which underpins narrative interviewing. This particular section of Chapter three highlights how narrative research is useful for drawing out how meaning is constructed through storytelling and allowing the participants to talk about their own experiences in an unstructured way. I engage with critiques about joint interviewing and explain the importance of joint interviews in my methods. I also discuss feminist debates about what is knowable through research.

I outline the ethical advantages to interviewing couples together and move toward a position that the negotiation between participants in the interview provides rich material. I then consider how relationships are performed both within the relationship and to outsiders. I develop the discussion about joint interviewing into a consideration of my own positionality in the interview context, and I reflect upon the unfolding relationship between the participants and me, as well as my shifting insider/outsider position. I then outline the more practical aspects of the research, including the process of recruiting self-selecting participants, and the characteristics of the sample of couples interviewed. I then engage with multi-sited research before finally reflecting on the use of language, the writing process and analysis.

Chapter four is the first of three empirical chapters. I engage with the motivations for migrating for love, how the migration is made meaningful and the negotiations around the migration. I analyse how these migrations are narrated as exceptional in relation to non-migrant relationships. I scrutinise the influences which motivated the migration of couples who were living in different countries. I discuss love migrant couples' motivations for migration in relation to literatures about contemporary relationships and personal life. I then move on to argue that embodied everyday experience is important in the lives of these couples. In the following section, I analyse how these couples negotiated who would migrate. I engage with

research on highly skilled migrant couples as well as literatures on the discourses of love. I bring in discussion about gender to argue that the lead/follower framework often used in migration studies research on couples can be developed by using the lens of love.

I then move on to analysing how place is narrated as both an unimportant backdrop to the migration and an emotionally charged spatial field which influences love migrant trajectories. I examine the complex ways that place is entangled with performances of love and how it interacts with emergent articulations of subjectivity. Participants' narratives of place also reveal considerations of the lifestyle available in those places, the cost of living and proximity to family and friends. I analyse how place is imagined and 'Othered' in participant narratives. I also explore how relationships with people outside the relationship, such as family, friends and ex-partners influence their decisions about where to migrate to. I engage with literatures about family who are left behind in migration and about how care is performed in mobility. Finally, I discuss how love migrant couples try to find equilibrium through their choice of destination, but that equity is not always achieved.

In Chapter five I present participants' narratives about objects. In the first section I discuss the varied ways that the chosen objects were important in love migrant narratives, arguing that they are integral to how people understand their feelings. The remaining chapter is organised into sections which relate to the stage of the couple relationship when the object was most significant. First my analysis focuses on objects which relate to the beginnings of love migrant couple relationships, when couples were determining whether they would become a couple. I argue that the objects shed light on the ways that the body is important in understanding love relationships between couples. In the next section I analyse the early stages of relationships and examine how objects are related to narratives about commitment to the relationship. I argue that displaying shared interests and tastes as well as demonstrating knowledge of one's partner's taste is part of the multiple ways that love is understood and performed. In the final section, I present narratives about objects which relate to post-migration love practices. I argue that these objects are bound up with the continual negotiation and renegotiation of the relationship and allow deeper knowledge of one's partner to emerge.

In Chapter six I examine love migrant couples' narratives in relation to how they engage with love, migration and materialities to craft their subjectivities. The first section establishes how love can be connected to cosmopolitan aspirations and middle-class tastes. I analyse the subtle but powerful ways that participants distance themselves from mainstream, consumerist depictions of love through their choice of objects. I argue that their preference for more mundane items is connected to their desire to engage with a particular language of love

which values the mundane (Illouz, 1997, 1998). In the subsequent section I analyse how their processes of distinction set up divisions of self and other in terms of both non-migrants and how they perceive other kinds of migrant. I argue that, by distinguishing migrant relationships from non-migrant relationships, participants craft elite migrant subjectivities. I then discuss how elite migrant subjectivities are also performed through the objects chosen.

Finally, in Chapter seven I synthesise the key contributions from each chapter to address the research objectives detailed above and make recommendations for further research. In the first part of the conclusion, I reflect on how using love as a lens through which to view migration reveals nuanced understandings about couple migration. I argue that incorporating love into analyses of migrant lives adds complexity to and develops our understanding of migration frameworks. I then examine the significance of materiality and embodiment to contemporary understandings of love and argue that an embodied perspective enhances our understanding of love. I develop the discussion on materiality to argue that love migrant couples use materialities to express socially distinct subjectivities. Lastly, I expand upon the usefulness of the category love migrant in academic research to illuminate migrant experiences and enrich our understanding of migrant lives. I reflect on debates about the use of categories in the social sciences and the importance of grounding subjectively defined categories in wider social contexts. I then turn to the specifics of love migration and why researchers should adopt love migration as a concept and consider implications for future research.

Chapter 2. Love, Couples and Materiality

Introduction

Scholarship on love in late modernity has highlighted how love is multidimensional and diverse, changing across time and space and filtered through gender (Jackson, 1999) and social discourses. Understanding love as multiple and shifting allows space to emphasise that love is co-constructed (Langhamer, 2013) and underscores that social forces influence the intimate sphere of our lives. As love is negotiated between partners, it is embodied and materialised through their everyday interaction. As such, in this thesis I define couple love relationships as embodied, emotional and relational experiences, constructed with and alongside a partner and mediated through social discourses.

My approach draws on both empirical research on migration, couples, love and intimacy as well as theorising about love, intimacy and personal life. I seek to understand narratives, subjectivities and experiences which shed light on the ways that love shapes and is shaped by the lives of people in couple relationships who chose to migrate. In this chapter I draw on literatures from geography, sociology, migration studies, feminist research, popular culture and connect theorising and grounded research about love, intimacy and mobility.

In the first part of this literature review, I outline how emotions and love have been approached in academic research, tracing the trajectories through feminist approaches to contemporary theory which leads to a consideration how empirical research has demonstrated the importance of everyday practices of love. I then move on to discussing social understandings of love and after that, I explore how love and heteronormative discourses are connected. The following section considers the material and embodied nature of love. The final two sections are about approaches to couples in migration research and how the emotional lives of couples in migration have been approached.

2.1 Trajectories of Emotions and Love

Over two decades ago, Anderson and Smith (2001) highlighted the neglect of emotional life in academic research. They argued that emotions are both gendered and political and thus are deserving of academic attention (2001, p. 7). However, because emotions tend to be positioned with the 'feminine' and academia tends to favour the 'masculine', emotions had been sidelined. They argued that analyses of the social should include emotions and embodied experiences to avoid producing 'anaemic knowledges' (2001, p. 9). By 2004, Davidson and Milligan had argued in their editorial to an issue of *Social and Cultural Geography* that there had been a 'welling-up' (p. 523) of emotion from within geography, influenced by a focus on the body. They argued more research was needed to understand how people feel 'through' (ibid.) their bodies and that research would benefit from articulating experiences from the perspective of feeling.

So, while engagement with emotions was gaining pace, it was, Davidson and Milligan argued, still more implicit than explicit (2004, p. 524) which needed addressing because 'our emotions matter' (ibid.). Davidson, Bondi and Smith responded by calling for emphasis on the spatio-temporal nature of emotions to be given more attention and beseeched researchers to be more emotionally engaged with the people and places they study (2005, p. 2). Commentary on the growing interest emotions provided reminders to situate these knowledges in the historical, political and embodied contexts in which they circulate (Tolia-Kelly, 2006) to avoid an ahistorical and universalist reading of emotions.

Later still in 2013, Morrison, Johnston and Longhurst pointed out that 'there does not seem to be a lot of love in geography' (p. 505) despite love's pervasiveness in society and personal life. Morrison et al. (2013) argued that while geographers have studied loving relationships from in relation to family and other types of relationship such as friendships, normative and non-normative sexual relationships and 'emotional and affectual relations' (p. 506), these literatures have not been defined as 'geographies of love' (p.506).

Morrison et al. (2013) maintained that love, 'like any other notion [...], needs to be held up to critical scrutiny' (p. 506), an idea which is central also to my thesis. They highlighted the useful insights on love from the social sciences and from geography, but they argued this work had focused 'primarily on romantic love [...] between heterosexual couples' (p. 508) which 'risk[ed] reproducing a narrow, idealized and limited version of love as only associated with spaces and subjectivities of traditional romantic love' (p. 508). They further suggested

that theorisations on love had shown ‘that modes of love and loving in late-modern detraditionalized societies have undergone fundamental changes with new patterns and forms of intimacy emerging’ (p. 508), citing authors such as Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995). They called for the concept of love to be ‘widened’ (p. 517) to incorporate other forms of love beyond sexual and romantic love. However, the idea that love had undergone fundamental changes had been critiqued (Jamieson, 1998; Smart, 2007) as theorisations about such shifts were often not borne out in empirical studies. Focusing on forms of love beyond couple love would allow more to be understood about love in its multiple and diverse contexts but, I would argue, heterosexual love needs to be subject to further critical attention through attention to the emotional fields in people’s lives (Kolehmainen and Juvonen, 2018).

Opening up the field of love studies, Morrison et al. argued, would allow for increased engagement with what love does and with love’s ‘spatial, relational and political’ (2013, p. 506) aspects. Their call for engagement with the political aspects of love can be furthered firstly through engagement with the work of Lauren Berlant (2001) whose conceptualisation of love as paradoxical or ‘oxymoronic’ pinpoints the way that love can be both individually and subjectively felt but normatively expressed, and secondly through Ahmed’s (2004a, 2004b) work as she examines how an individual’s love can be transferred to the collective.

Morrison et al. remind us that love is felt through the body in particular spaces, including online spaces, and argue that paying attention to how love and place are mutually constituted is one way that geographers could contribute to theorising love relations (2013, p. 512). The emplaced aspects should be considered alongside relational aspects which, they argue, includes ‘the relations and spaces between and among individuals, groups and objects’ (2012, p. 514). They draw on Sarah Ahmed’s (2004a, 2004b) work in particular because of her engagement with how emotions shape and are shaped by objects. Morrison et al. give the example of jewellery such as rings, objects which can become ‘hugely invested with a range of emotions’ (2013, p. 514). They suggest that engagement with the ‘relationality between an individual and objects’ (p. 514) can help geographers to develop research on love, and taking inspiration from Ahmed’s perspectives on emotional relations in the spaces between people and objects is one way of doing this. They also suggest new methodologies would be helpful in the pursuit of understanding love, and I have developed this perspective in this thesis through attention to objects and through the methodology.

A spatial and emplaced perspective of emotion seem to make it an ideal subject for migration researchers. Yet they too pointed out that emotions had previously been overlooked (Mai and King, 2009 p. 297), although this was beginning to change (e.g. Svašek, 2010, 2012).

Given the cultural specificity of emotions (e.g. Lutz and White, 1986; Lutz and Abu-Lughod, 1990), exploring them in the context of migration would highlight how ‘migration invariably affects emotions as both (corporeally) embodied and (societally) embedded’ (Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015, p.75). Research on how migration feels was needed to address the lack of research on ‘the emotional side of the migrant condition’ (2015, p.73) as Boccagni and Baldassar put it. They argued that a unified approach to migration and emotion would provide ‘an important corrective and critique of the predominant “economic rationalist” approaches to migration of the past’ (Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015, p.74). The emphasis on economics has been inherited, they suggest, from the legacy of theories which separated reason and emotion, which has continued the discourse in which emotions are seen as the “soft stuffing” to the “hard” issues that really matter.’ (p.77).

Despite the multiple calls for more attention to be paid to emotions and with increasing interest in other areas of emotional life, there has been a reserved approach to love (Ferguson and Jónasdóttir, 2014). A detached position to love has, Carol Smart argued, cultivated a preference for studying issues which may be ‘near’ (2007, p.54) to love, such as care by looking at ‘labours of love’ (2007, p. 65). Love has perhaps been avoided because it has previously been aligned with patriarchal oppression of women by some feminist agendas (Ferguson and Jónasdóttir, 2014, p. 3). However, when love has been positioned as a force for liberation often the focus has been on sexuality rather than love (ibid.).

Reservations about love as a subject of academic research are not shared across all disciplines. For example, sociologists have explored love as a medium of communication (Luhmann, 2010), how internet communication mediates how people love (Ben-Ze’ev, 2004), and how love is a ‘fundamental idea of social life’ (Iorio, 2014, 7). Research on love has been prolific in the field of popular culture and spans themes such as love in female superhero stories (Stuller, 2010), or in detective stories with a female lead (Mizejewski, 2004), how love is presented in television series (di Mattia, 2004) and studies which examine how love is portrayed and interpreted in popular romance fiction, or girls’ magazines (Illouz, 1997, 1998; Tinkler, 1995) or how Hollywood portrayals of romance intersect with race and ethnicity (hooks, 1996/2009).

For historians, as Kate Barclay notes, ‘[l]ove has been a topic of perennial interest’ (2025, p.ix). And historians have pointed out that identifying what love looks like across time can be difficult (Holloway, 2019, p.7), particularly if there are differences in how it is understood across gender, class, ethnicity, generation and other intersections of difference. But researching love is an important endeavour as it ‘helps us to understand the ways that emotion can drive action’ (Langhamer, 2025, p.7). Anthropologists too have concerned themselves with

the cultural specificity of love (Abu-Lughod and Lutz, 1990) and the impact of social change on love and intimate relationships (Ahearn, 2003).

2.2 Feminist Lineages of Love

Feminist writing has been a productive site for research on love, but it has varied in its reception of love through the different 'waves'. First wave feminism identified couple love as a problem stemming from the patriarchal structure of society. Love was seen as a way of beguiling women into marriage (e.g. Wollstonecraft, 1792/ 2008) and perpetuating established gender roles in which women were submissive to men. The view that love was oppressive was similar in 'second wave' feminism, demonstrated by Simone de Beauvoir, who, writing in 1949, argued that within the institution of marriage women were subjugated and considered love to keep them trapped in patriarchal relationships (1949/ 2011). Gender was assumed to affect how love was felt and love was conceptualised as different for men and women (de Beauvoir, 1949/ 2011; Firestone, 1972; Comer, 1974).

Second wave feminists challenged and reshaped what women were supposed to want regarding love; women were encouraged to define themselves and to not look for a man for happiness. These perspectives have been criticised for their over-focus on heterosexuality, which was not problematised, but they did highlight questions about the role of power and gender in love relationships. Stevi Jackson has argued that early feminist perspectives sounded 'naive' (1993, p.206) because they suggested,

that this quest for love is an illusion which, once 'seen through', can be easily discarded. This simplistic conception of ideology and its relation to subjectivity, the implication that all we needed was an effort of will to break out from the shackles of exclusive romantic love, effectively precluded the possibility of confronting the potency of this emotion and seeking for an explanation of it (ibid.).

She argues that to be relevant to personal life, social ideologies have connections with individual subjectivities. Love, therefore, must resonate at an individual level otherwise the idea of love would not have much influence in people's lives (Jackson, 1993, p.202). The

mismatch between personal and social understandings of love shows that it is important to see social and personal discourses as related without collapsing their distinctions.

These concerns were addressed to some extent in the third wave of feminism, along with concerns about the white, middle-class nature of these feminisms (hooks, 2000; Hill Collins, 2022). Third wave is sometimes conflated with other terms such as postfeminist because third wave is not a single-issue movement and is often entwined with other social movements which see gender as part of a wider programme of social justice (Heywood, 2006, p.xx), but these terms along with others such as antifeminism are contested (Gerhard, 2005). Before the 1950s, Western men and women were expected to marry. Romantic love was a goal for women who were 'destined to be wife and mother' (Braidotti, 1994, p. 235). But third wave feminism tended to conceptualise love as an individual 'choice' (Snyder, 2008), a 'form of inclusiveness' (Heywood 2006, p.xx) which acknowledges differences and varying identities and 'refuses to police the boundaries of the feminist political' (Snyder, 2008, p.175). These challenges exposed the problems with the assumption that love and marriage went together. Third wave tended to replace the category 'women' with personal narratives which showed the multiplicity of perspectives and experiences and preferred 'multivocality' (Snyder, 2008, p.175) to overly synthesised theorising. Discourses of choice and the importance of difference were emphasised in later feminisms and the idea that women were 'duped' into falling in love receded. As (white, western, middle-class) women were increasingly able to choose who to marry or have relationships with, if at all, love relationships were increasingly seen as optional and to be entered into for their own sake (Giddens, 1992).

Thus, couple love relationships can be positioned as a problem, the route to self-fulfilment, or one of many other life choices, depending on the feminist perspective adopted (if any) in research on love. In this thesis, I see couple love as entwined in the life decisions which people make. However, it is not a straightforward choice to love or not, as love is an embodied, relational emotion which is entangled with social discourses and norms. I will now move on to outlining contemporary academic discourses on love.

2.3 Love in Late Modernity

Understanding how intimate life has changed has been a central issue in several influential studies of contemporary Euro-American society. Intimate relationships and love are often

connected because '[l]ove is intimacy's closest conceptual relative and relationships that are mutually recognised and subjectively experienced by those who love each other as relationships of love, [...] typically involve practices of intimacy' (Jamieson, 2011, p.9). Intimate relationships can mean any relationship, such as immediate or extended family or friends and work on intimacy often encompasses different types of relationship. There is general agreement that couple relationships have undergone change in terms of gender roles, cohabiting and expectations about what a couple relationship should be. Intimacy has been linked to social change, such as technological advances, which has been said to have reduced geographical limitations (Valentine, 2006) and therefore 'transformed' intimate relationships (Giddens, 1992), but there are different views about exactly how and to what degree changes have taken place. I now review the work of influential scholars whose work has shaped academic and social discourses about love and intimacy in contemporary Euro-American society.

Work on intimacy has explored the extent to which revealing oneself to one's partner has become an expected part of a couple relationship (Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1999; Langhamer, 2007, 2013; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2014). Giddens theorises that in contemporary society people look for couple relationships that satisfy both partners who move on once that relationship stops delivering the desired satisfactions. The relationship is based upon 'equality in emotional give and take' (1992, p.62) and mutual sexual pleasure is important to its success. He argues that emotional disclosure fosters understanding between partners which is essential as 'knowing the traits of the other is central' (1992, p.63).

Giddens' view that partners are emotionally involved equals has been criticised as too idealistic (Jamieson, 1998, 1999) and not sufficiently evidenced by empirical research (Smart, 2007). Jamieson (1998) argued that disclosing intimacy has not become the dominant story in social or personal life. While it has entered social narratives about what relationships should and can be, it is not universally accepted and there are competing understandings about what intimate relationships are. Disclosure, she argues, does not always bring about intimacy. Furthermore, disclosure is not the only way that intimacy can be understood. Jamieson argued that intimacy involved 'close association and privileged knowledge, empathy and understanding' (1998, p.18) with significant others. The more mundane aspects of 'practical caring and sharing' (1998, p.160) are, she demonstrates, equally important. Jamieson argued that the couple form has become pervasive, but the hyperindividualism which underpins the 'pure relationship' does not have such a strong hold. Other perspectives situate intimacy within ties created through obligation and responsibility. Further, community remains a significant concept in the lives of most people (1988).

Social understandings of relationships have come to incorporate the idea of equality in relationships, yet in practice there remain many obstacles to achieving equality in couple relationships (Jamieson, 1998, pp.164-166). Where equality is desired in relationships but not achieved, 'many people continue to make sense of gender inequalities by drawing on older stories about how personal life should be led' (1998, p.166). Those who manage to overcome some inequalities in their personal lives 'are proof of the possibility of radical change rather than an indication of rapid progress in that direction' (1998, p.169). Jamieson focuses on 'disclosing intimacy', highlighting both the emotional and physical dimensions. In disclosing intimacy, importance is given to 'mutual disclosure, constantly revealing your inner thoughts and feelings to each other. It is an intimacy of the self rather than an intimacy of the body, although the completeness of intimacy of the self may be enhanced by bodily intimacy' (Jamieson, 2011, p.1). It is, she says, an intimacy which requires 'people participate as equals' (ibid.); however the development of intimacy is hampered when 'social barriers' and 'structural inequalities' cannot be overcome (ibid.). Jamieson questions not only whether disclosing intimacy is common, as some have argued (e.g. Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2014), but whether it really exists at all.

Psychoanalytic thought and the rise of the 'psy' disciplines (Rose, 1989) have perpetuated the idea that talking and disclosing personal details are important to emotional well-being. Jamieson points out that talking about feelings as a route to well-being is not accepted across all societies and cultures. Jamieson mentions that in Euro-American cultures 'keeping yourself to yourself' and adopting a more stoic approach (1998, pp.7-8) might also be considered positive aspects. So, the degree to which emotional closeness can and should be fostered through disclosure differs across generations, genders and societies.

Emotional proximity can also relate to boundaries which separate the intimate space of the couple from others outside of the relationship. Intimate relationships involve 'closeness' (Jamieson, 2011, p.1) which could be emotional closeness, often associated with 'deep knowing' (Morgan, 2009) and 'disclosing intimacy' (Giddens, 1991). Closeness can also mean physical proximity which may or may not involve emotional closeness (Thien, 2005).

Maintaining closeness between the couple and distance between the couple and others as a necessary part of intimacy has a long trajectory in sociological discourse (e.g. Simmel, 1906). Giddens has argued that boundaries are important to 'confluent love' because people in intimate relationships should know each other and make themselves available but not be 'absorbed by the other' (1992, p.94). In Giddens' view couples should seek to maintain separate selves within the intimate space of the relationship. He continues, 'opening out to the other, paradoxically, requires personal boundaries, because it is a communicative phenomenon

[...] The balance of openness, vulnerability and trust developed in a relationship governs whether or not personal boundaries become divisions which obstruct rather than encourage such communication' (1992, p. 94). It is down to the couple to negotiate whether these boundaries 'obstruct' or 'encourage' communication.

The approach to intimacy outlined above involves a conscious maintaining of boundaries which are then continuously broken down through communication. It also suggests, as Jamieson has pointed out in her critique of Giddens, that it involves increasing boundaries between the couple and others outside the relationship. As she says, in many depictions of intimate life, 'intimates are described as if encapsulated together by a protective boundary that stops distractions that would otherwise interfere with their intimacy or by an exclusionary boundary that keeps non-intimates out' (2005, p.1).

The discussion of boundaries underlines the importance of including spatiality when considering love and intimacy in couple relationships because the idea that couples exist in their own bubble is often reinforced in popular culture. For example, Otnes and Pleck (2003) show how wedding photography couples are frequently photographed alone, looking only into each other's eyes.

The importance of spatiality in romantic love is also demonstrated in Lynda Johnston's (2006) work on New Zealand as a wedding destination. She reveals how, through the promotion of rugged landscapes, the landscape and the weddings constitute each other as natural. Johnston's (2006) research shows that the wedding, as a public expression of love, is a taken-for-granted performance of the 'naturalness' of heterosexual relationships. The rugged landscapes have connotations of purity and naturalness which become 'enfolded' into understandings of heterosexuality. These landscapes are presented as a place where the couple can be 'alone together in nature' (2006, p.199), away from family and guests. As Johnston argues, 'couples alone together in nature are able to distinguish their marriage from, and elevating it above, other affectionate bonds' (2006, p.199). The couple become the sole focus, thus familial and social responsibilities which might be associated with marriage are less important.

Jamieson (2005) argues though that 'while boundaries often play a part in creating a sense of being the "special one", the ideal of couple relationships for many, not all practices of intimacy create boundaries. Some caring activities and ways of spending time together need not be exclusive, dyadic or "family only" projects.' (2005, p.9). She points out that 'much of what distinguishes intimate relationships from other relationships concerns shared history, common property and shared projects' (p.9). It is not, therefore, only the maintenance of

boundaries between the couple and outsiders which create a sense of the relationship being special, but the accumulation of a shared past between the couple.

In highlighting the importance of connectedness, relationships and feelings in studies of family, sociologist Carol Smart proposed a conceptualisation of family life which acknowledged how people 'relate meaningfully and significantly to one another across distances, in different places and also when there is no pre-given genetic or even legal bond' (2007, p. 7). She called for a broader theory of 'personal life' which deepened understanding of how people relate to one another and which she argued should be grounded in inductive research.

Smart outlines what she saw as the 'tension' between broad, generalised approaches and detailed empirical studies which she identifies as proliferating in the mid-1990s. Academic thinking about family life in sociology had followed broader sociological trends and produced accounts of social change, rather than specific accounts of family life. These theorisations have then been used to explain 'the kinds of family change often "revealed"' in large-scale surveys and social statistics' (p.8), but because of the deductive nature of this research it has not accurately represented what is happening in people's lives. As such, theorising about family life has perhaps been overly eager to depict social change and has exaggerated, she points out, the 'decline' of family life for example by Bauman who 'offers no evidence in support of his assertions' (p. 20), changes in motherly love and the role of children in family life (pp.12-13). She is also critical of Giddens' theorising on individualism as she argues that ideas about individualisation and companionate relationships have been commented on by social historians since the time of industrialisation.

Smaller, empirical studies and particularly qualitative research, she argues, are better at understanding the everyday lives of families, especially minority groups, but such studies have rarely had much impact on 'sociological Thought (with a capital T)' (2007, p.8). She cautions against relying only on empirical studies as they are connected to the past or present and can only reflect 'the scope of expressible experience' (p. 25) which could lead to neglecting certain 'ways of knowing and imagining' (p. 25). She then proposes methodologies 'may not always be sufficiently innovative' to get at what matters to people, an issue I acknowledge and go some way to addressing in this thesis.

Academic discourses do not remain strictly in the confines of academia, so, as Smart argues, it is important to understand how they are entangled with people's lives. She makes the point that it is 'important to understand how personal meanings iterate with social and cultural meanings since they do not operate in separate or parallel universes' (2007, p.158). For Smart, there was a pressing need for grounded, inductive empirical studies which could

challenge general theories because not only do they influence academic thought but they 'enter into everyday understandings of family life and family change such that they start to frame the context in which people in general experience their families – or at least how they perceive *other* people's families' (2007, p.9 emphasis in original).

I respond to Smart's call for inductive research which explores how social narratives of love have influence on love migrant couples' understandings of and practices within their own relationships in this thesis. Smart also advocated for the inclusion of 'things' (p.156) in research on personal life because they 'throw light on social relationships because of the meanings that social actors give to them' (p.157). She argues for attention to be paid to the personal meanings given to items used, experienced and exchanged among intimate relations as these are as important as social understandings (pp.174-177). She stresses understanding the importance people give to objects alongside the social meanings attributed to them and I have been inspired by her arguments to use objects in creative methods in my research.

In this thesis, I analyse to what extent these differing perspectives influence love migrant understandings of love and how these shape (or not) their trajectories. Having discussed some influential perspectives on love in relation to families and couples, I now give an overview of how love is relationally embodied through its practices.

2.4 Modalities and Practices of Love

Love is not only expressed verbally but enacted and felt. The emphasis placed on language in 'disclosing intimacy' overlooks other ways that intimacy is performed (Jamieson, 1998, 1999, 2011). Jamieson has argued that spoken expressions of love often are accompanied by practices which give weight and sincerity to linguistic forms and which she calls 'practices of intimacy' (2011, p.1). Jamieson derived 'practices of intimacy' from an earlier concept, 'family practices', coined by David Morgan (1996) whose aim was to shift research on family away from prescriptive ideas about what families were to a focus on the multiple and varied ways that people 'do' family. As such, Jamieson's term allows us to think about how people 'do' love. As she puts it, "'practices of intimacy' refer to practices which enable, generate and sustain a subjective sense of closeness and being attuned and special to each other' (Jamieson, 2011, p.1), allowing us to feel and show that we 'know' and are 'known' by our partner.

The kinds of practices which might constitute 'practices of intimacy' are varied. They might include 'giving to, sharing with, spending time with, knowing, practically caring for, feeling attachment to, expressing affection for' (Jamieson, 2011, p.3). Practical caring might, for example, be a gesture such as 'making a cup of tea, clearing up after eating, taking the children out to allow the partner some time alone' (Gabb and Fink, 2015, p.21). These mundane activities allow partners in love relationships (Gabb and Fink, 2015, p.21) to demonstrate and acquire intimate knowledge of each other. These practices are part of the important relationship work (Hochschild, 1983) that couples do, just as 'doing family' (Morgan, 1996) is based on 'little fragments of daily life which are part of the normal taken-for-granted existence' (Morgan, 1996, p.190). Rather than grand or romantic gestures, it is these mundanities which many couples value the most (Gabb and Fink, 2015). Often these take place in 'down time' or 'wasted time' (Gabb and Fink, 2015, p.33) which allow couples to devote personal time to each other. As Jamieson has said, intimacy is not only about knowing one's partner but also demonstrating care and feeling attachment (2011), thus practices which take place in 'down time' show that 'it is often time which defines relationship work and which characterises couples' investment in knowing and understanding each other' (Gabb and Fink, 2015, p.29). Practices of intimacy, then, are often small gestures which allow couples to display their knowledge of their relationship to each other. As partners get to know each other, they accrue 'couple knowledge' (Gabb and Fink, 2015, p. 21) and having and displaying such knowledge is one way that partners affirm their love for each other (Smart, 2007, p.68).

Practices of intimacy might not be noticed or understood to others beyond the intimate relationship, but they are essential to those within. Janet Finch, who has also drawn on Morgan's work to include the concept of display, argues that families 'need to be seen to be done' (2007, p.79) through gestures and practices to be understood by wider social groups as families. These practices are often mundane and 'taken-for-granted' so they can go unnoticed or be interpreted in other ways. Therefore, Finch says, practices which are intended to communicate intimate relationships need to be 'displayed' to others so they can be interpreted as such (2007, p.66). Displaying intimacy through everyday practices is also important to the individuals involved as intimate relationships are fluid and may change over time. While Finch's focus is on family relationships, she also suggests that 'all relationships require an element of display to sustain them' (2007, p. 71) and the intensity of the display varies according to circumstance. Personal relationships, according to Finch (2007), need to be displayed to anyone whose recognition of that relationship is important; this could be an individual, another family group, or an institution.

Notwithstanding the usefulness of Finch's concept, Jacqui Gabb has pointed out it is problematic because some things and people are 'omitted' (2011, p.38). While it 'elucidates how family relationships are presented and rendered meaningful' (Gabb, 2011, p.39), it highlights that not all practices are understood as demonstrating family or intimate relationships. It therefore risks reinforcing a 'normalising gaze' (Gabb, 2011, p.39). For Gabb, the problem with Finch's (2007) idea of display is that while it reveals how some people 'do' family, it makes some 'invisible' because not all displays of relationships are received with positive acknowledgement when displayed to outsiders. Gabb refers to her own research on family relationships, particularly with lesbian couples. Often their relationships are not acknowledged by outsiders as meaningful relationships and so those whose relationships are already marginal might be pushed further to one side in the paradigm of displaying intimacy (Gabb, 2011, p.43).

Some relationships contain displays of emotion which are not recognisable to anyone but the people in them. As such, Finch's idea 'that all relationships require an element of display to sustain them' needs to be considered in terms of practices which are not easily recognised or displayed. As Gabb has pointed out, 'the existence of relationships is not wholly reliant on public-facing performances to make them meaningful' (2011, p.53). Therefore, it is important to look for 'invisible' ways of expressing love (Gabb, 2011, p.50).

Getting at emotional experiences is central to my thesis, so the methods have been chosen with the idea in mind that not all experience can be expressed verbally. I am attentive to the idea that love is not always straightforwardly expressed and remain dedicated to understanding how love is enacted and experienced in ways which are meaningful to love migrant couples.

2.5 Social Stories of Love

Jackson has argued that "'love" is not a fixed, unchanging emotion and that its shifting meanings are the outcome of gendered struggles' (1999, p.115). This recognises that social forces influence the intimate sphere of our lives in ways that differ across time and space. Ideas about love can be multiple and varied both for different people and across one's life course, such that 'we create for ourselves a sense of what our emotions are, of what being 'in love' is' (Jackson, 1999, p.106). The intimate sphere of our lives is located within overlapping social

ideas and meaning so it is influenced and shaped through participation (or not) in 'learning scripts, positioning ourselves within discourses, constructing narratives of self' (Jackson, 1999, p.106). Thus, personal narratives of intimacy are connected to wider social discourses or 'scripts', and who we love and how we love are influenced by the social contexts in which we live (Stacey, 2011). Cultural ideologies inform how we understand our emotions and feelings, such as falling in love (Jackson, 1993). Even sexual desire is shaped by cultural tropes (Jackson and Scott, 2016, p. 97). So, as Jackson says, 'far from being just a personal, private phenomenon, love is very much a part of our public culture' (1993, p. 203).

Social discourses of love and intimacy are influenced by popular culture (Evans, 2003). These influences include films, television, online media and children's stories or conversations among peers which communicate and to some extent prescribe standard forms of love and romance (Jackson, 1999, p.108). These discourses are consumed and internalised but are also narratives which people 'can learn to manipulate' (Jackson, 1999, p.109) and, thus, can be continually made and remade to present multiple options and pathways. Within people's lives, these scripts are shaped by and interpreted through social class, gender, race and so on (Rubin, 1976; Illouz, 1997, 1998) as well as emotional responses, so while they can be personalised and altered, they are not entirely malleable as they are based on socially accepted intimacy scripts and are linked to the life course (Jackson, 1999). It is important to understand how social understandings and narratives of love intersect with personal lives because general theories influence how people live their lives (Smart, 2007), and therefore how they love.

Cultural ideas about love are constructed and imagined through cultural reproduction and there are debates about the extent to which these texts cause young women to accept patriarchal ideologies of love. For example, Radway (1984) questioned whether cultural scripts were taken literally by women who engaged with them. She argued that women used these ideas as fantasies through which to escape the reality of their lives and 'temporarily refusing the demands associated with their social role as wives and mothers' (1984, p. 11); thus it was a form of escapism used by women who were fully aware of their situation. However, McRobbie has argued that these narratives are 'immensely powerful, especially if we consider [them] being absorbed in [their] codified form each week for years at a time' (1991, p. 114). They provide cultural standards and norms which women may identify with and internalise.

Morrison et al. (2013) draw on Paul Johnson (2005) to argue that 'most people in the West, and many beyond, have grown up being continuously exposed to images in the media and popular culture which present an idealized and essentialized version of romantic love – a version that is heterosexual and monogamous' (2013, p. 517). Through media representations western people's lives are, from a very young age, geared towards finding romantic love

(Jackson, 1999; Evans, 2003; Johnson, 2005). Thus, finding a romantic partner is a normalised part of the life course for many (Jackson, 1999, p. 108).

Examining the ways that migrants understand love in their lives can help to show the extent to which social narratives have an impact on their migration. It can also show how personal life can effect change on social stories over time and in different places. The importance given to personal meanings is one reason why I opted for the word love over other terms such as intimacy. I use 'love' an emic concept, coming from the participants' narratives, and turn it into an analytic concept to focus on love-motivated migration. I draw on theories of intimacy, and channel them through the work of love.

Narratives about love which circulate in society, perpetuated by media, were analysed in influential work by Eva Illouz about love and consumerism in the US (Illouz, 1997, 1998). Her research found that impetuous, exciting and passionate love stories which suggest love-at-first-sight relationships are aspired to as much as they are derided. While the passion and intensity are desirable, they seem too frivolous to be a good basis for a long-term relationship. More stable relationships require work, effort and skill and need to be based on compatibility and embedded in everyday life, according to her findings. Contemporary love is therefore contradictory as the loving self wants both. Impetuous, passionate love relationships are seen as film-like narratives. They are desirable and memorable, more so than relationships based on friendships and compatibility.

Through cultural reproduction, impetuous love stories become more salient and embedded in the body. They in turn become the base narratives against which other love stories, both real and fictional, are measured. In fact, Illouz (1997, 1998) found that relationships which grew from friendships were not always seen as successful love relationships as they lacked sufficient excitement. The desire for adventure in love stories means contemporary love relationships 'contain[...] a structure of feeling with affinities to the emotions and cultural values fostered by the sphere of consumption' (1998, p.176) because buying things is, like a love affair, compelled by the need for excitement. As such, according to Illouz, in contemporary society people expect to have a large choice of possible partners and to gather information about partners before deciding.

Jackson says that social 'scripting' 'provides us with a stock of knowledge on which to draw in making sense of "love" and culturally intelligible ways of "doing" love' (1999, p. 37). These 'scripts' influence what is seen as 'normal' and mean that expressions of love which do not fit in with these scripts risk not being recognised and becoming marginalised (Gabb, 2011).

A discourse-based approach to researching emotions places the emphasis on what people say about how they are feeling. From a discourse-based perspective, language is seen as both

the medium of communication and the object of enquiry as the representation of emotions through language (Edwards, 1999; Gómez-Estern and de la Mata Benítez, 2013). But linguistic anthropologists have demonstrated that linguistic expression is not a uni-directional mapping of linguistic signs onto reality, so the linguistic expression of emotion is not a simple representation of what the individual may be feeling.

The ways which individuals interact with others in the world through language are complex and, as meaning is made socially and the 'ownership of meaning' (Besnier, 1990, p. 420) is not entirely the individual's, language cannot be seen as an entirely rational outpouring of an inner world into a social world. Furthermore, there is much work in social linguistics and linguistic anthropology which problematises the relationship between verbal and non-verbal communication (e.g. Ekman, 1989). Spoken communication should not be understood only as the words themselves; the voice itself is bodily and can be manipulated (for example in terms of pitch and volume) both consciously and unconsciously, and can also be beyond our control, so should be seen as part of the 'non-verbal'.

Research on discursive representations of love and romance has found that social class has as great an impact on how cultural scripts about romance and love are viewed as gender. Illouz's research on how couples use commodities as part of their practices of love suggests that working-class people more likely to accept and embrace them than the middle- and upper-middle classes (Illouz, 1997, 1998). Within the confines of social class, she found that men and women recognised similar ideas and tropes as expressive of love. There tended to be a greater difference across class lines. Although, it is important to note here that her analysis shows how men and women understood consumerist expressions of love, which is distinct from the actual emotional labour involved in intimate relationships where there seems to be greater disparity across gender. The images, tropes and objects she presented to her participants were often cast in already highly gendered roles; a man on one knee proposing marriage, for example.

The ways that social discourses of love intermingle with personal understandings and emotional responses is central in my thesis. The importance of social stories is reflected in the methodology I use. Narrative interviewing was used because it can capture the relations between private experience and more public, social worlds allowing researchers to see how couples narrate their experiences, and how they mobilise discourses which circulate in wider social contexts (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Maynes, Pierce and Laslett, 2008). This method allows us to see how love is mediated through cultural models.

The meanings afforded to love are not static, however, and are closely linked to social and economic contexts and change over time (Jackson, 1993; Langhamer, 2013) and across

space as well as being experienced differently because of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality among other embodied aspects. Ideas about what love means are influenced by social discourses and shaped and framed by multiple social spheres and media representations. I unpack which social discourses love migrant couples draw on in their narratives and how these shape their performances of love migration.

When considering love across geographical space, the influence of media representations of love and romance has been commented on by numerous scholars (Firestone, 1972; Frazer, 1987; Jackson, 1993; Illouz, 1997, Evans, 2003). Such is the spread of Western ideas about love that there is a body of research examining how their dispersal has affected non-Western communities (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Abu-Lughod and Lutz, 1990; Ahearn, 2003; Lipset, 2004; Gregg, 2006; Bhana, 2013). Related to the spread of Western ideas of love, research on how practices of consumption have 'mixed and interfered with new definitions of romance and intimacy' (Illouz, 1997, p.26) has shown that love is varied and contested within communities and cultures and experienced diversely and unequally by different people across space and time. In short, while Euro-American ideas about love may have spread, love is experienced locally and differently across geographical space. Thus, in this chapter I examine how the act of migrating can shape how love is understood and performed.

It is not only ideas that travel, but people. Hence, mobility and migration make space for emergent emotional subjectivities. Research on transnationalism and love has shown that love can be transformed as well as transformative when it is reinterpreted across global borders (Faier, 2007, 2009; Frohlick, 2009; Mai and King, 2009; Walsh, 2018; Borges Jelinic, 2019). I am concerned in this chapter with the complex subjectivities which can be amplified by and produced through migrating for love. Implicit in this concern is the understanding that love and the self are connected (Langhamer, 2013). The self is often understood to be relational which means that our understanding of who we are stems, to some degree, from our interactions with others, the environment and the things within it (Conradson and McKay, 2007).

Selfhood, then, emerges from the relationships we have with other people and, importantly to this thesis, it follows that couple relationships will be important to selfhood. So, people understand their own sense of self in part through their relationships with others. I examine how the subjectivities that the participants narrate emerge through relations with the people, objects and places in their lives.

2.6 Heteronormativity and Love

In the 'West', love is an established conduit to and requisite for couple relationships. While the centrality of love to couple relationships is accepted in general social discourse, in academia conflating research on the relationship form with the emotional connection assumed to underpin it mean that couple and love are reduced and melded as an 'unmarked category of "love"' (Bhana, 2013). The couple relationship is privileged on heteronormative perspectives of intimate relationships so, in the context of research on couple love, critical engagement with the structure of heteronormativity is important.

In this section, I discuss how work on heteronormativity has shaped research on love. I present perspectives that suggest that analysing intimate relationships through social structures such as heteronormativity has not been able to fully explain why gender inequalities persist in intimate relationships. I draw on research which supports the argument that a relational perspective on emotions draws attention to how power circulates in couple relationships and I argue that focusing on the emotional through empirical studies which prioritise grounded approaches poses another way of researching couple relationships.

Heterosexuality has been positioned as a subjectivity which does not need to be achieved, because it is situated as the 'default' (Johnson, 2005). Bell has argued that the positioning of heterosexuality as 'normal' has caused geography to become a heteronormative site of knowledge production in which 'heterosexuality simply isn't legible as sexuality' (Bell, 2009, p.119). Work which has sought to provide critical examination of heterosexuality from within geography has often been done through work on non-heterosexual identities and has exposed how spaces can be part of heteronormative ideologies, discourses, imaginaries and experiences (Bell, 2009, p.116). Notwithstanding, researching non-heterosexual relationships has reinforced the idea that heterosexual relationships do not need to be subject to the same critical focus. The assumed 'naturalness' of heterosexuality creates heteronormative thinking which includes institutions, behaviours, beliefs and rituals (Bell, 2009, p.115) which combined create a 'matrix' (ibid.), in which the heterosexual (married) couple is the zenith.

Attempts to challenge normative assumptions about family and pluralise what can be understood as family exposed the workings of heteronormativity to some extent. However, Sasha Roseneil and Shelley Budgeon (2004) have argued that heteronormative assumptions have marginalised research on love and care beyond the family. They called for more research on social change which would help to challenge the 'heteronormativity of the sociological imaginary' (2004, p.136).

Research on couples has also perpetuated heteronormative assumptions. For example, Roseneil argued that it is now widely accepted in both popular and academic discourses that people who have begun a couple relationship will at some point cohabit (2006, p.1). While this shift in socially acceptable coupling has taken the focus off marriage to some extent, cohabitation and coupling are so strongly linked that living alone is often interpreted as not being in a couple relationship (Roseneil, 2006). Indeed, couples which do live apart are subject to a body of literature examining why and have their own academic terminology — living apart together (e.g. Levin and Trost, 1999; Levin, 2004). Conflating living alone with not being in a couple has, Roseneil noted, caused confusion about what ‘singleness’ indicates in different social studies (2006, p.3), which contributes to stigmatising single people (DePaulo, 2023) and perpetuates the notion that living alone and being single are coterminous. Thus, while the married couple has been decentralised, the couple form remains ubiquitous (Roseneil et al., 2020, p.216).

Johnson analysed how ‘intimate loving is related to the practices of doing heterosexuality’ (2005, p.1) and showed that the practices surrounding romantic love are not only expressions of the emotion love, but that they (re)produce heterosexual norms. He argued that performing love is part of the processes of heterosexuality so love is, therefore, embedded in heterosexual norms (2005, p. 3). Heteronormativity provides forms of regulation which are particularly present in the experiences of women. Johnson argues that social regulation is often viewed negatively in heterosexual relationships because heterosexuality is seen as a ‘default’ (2005, p.136). He argues that homosexuality is deemed to be an ‘active identity’ and so when gay and lesbian people ‘assume socially available sexual identities’ adopting such identities is not viewed pejoratively (ibid.) even though these roles are similarly socially controlled. However, ‘whilst socially normative, heterosexuality still needs to be accomplished by those individuals who practice and identify as it’, so heterosexuality should also be thought of as an active identity. And yet, heterosexuality is a mode of being which goes unnoticed, unanalysed and unquestioned. Johnson compels us to examine such concerns with empirical research and analysis which moves fluidly between the personal experiences of love and the social forces which shape them (2005, p.138).

As legal enforcement of the couple-form has lessened, argue Roseneil et al., ‘social enforcement and cultural production of the couple-form has become more important in maintaining couple-normativity’ (2020, p.216). Social enforcement can take many forms including pressure from family and friends for example. As well as external pressure, many people put pressure on themselves to become part of a couple, which can feel immense. Roseneil et al. explain,

the need to be part of a couple can be strong. The yearning can feel organic, natural, as if it were coming from 'inside', and it can feel more real and more intense than any 'external' reality. Moreover, failure to live up to the couple-norm, and non-conformity with its expectation <-> injunctions, can produce profound inner turmoil – feelings of shame, lack and despair (2020, p.227)

Discourses about love create strong feelings which makes experiencing these discourses an embodied experience, as emotion is an embodied process. The pressure to be part of a couple might be salient at different times over the life course and people may or may not always respond to the feelings social discourses stir.

Johnson also argued that love and heterosexuality are 'enmeshed in a particular way of being' (2005, p.1). Arguing that love can become the basis for action, Johnson also proposed that 'being in love' can present 'ways of being, ways of existing, ways of becoming' which are compelling enough to make people want to pursue love (p.3). He cautions that love should not always be thought of as wholly oppressive even though it can involve social constraint because 'whatever else loving is, or whatever intimacy might be, it is usually founded in practices which begin with, and sometimes retain, aspects of joy and gratification' (2005, p.135). Thus the emotional aspects are important to understanding normative structures.

The feelings which social discourses and personal yearnings mobilise are not always explicitly recognised and can become internalised and ingrained in our subjectivities as a 'mode of being'. Going unnoticed is part of how normative ideas become ingrained. Roseneil et al., have written that being unseen 'might be understood as the very essence of a successful norm – fully internalized and existing below conscious awareness, part of what we might call the 'normative unconscious' (2020, p.227). The subtle way social discourses can take hold might explain why the couple-norm is 'woven into the fabric of subjectivity' (Roseneil et al., 2020, p.227) making it seem that being part of a couple is an integral part of self-realisation.

Social structures, such as heteronormativity and gender, are often used as the analytic framework for analysis on widely acknowledged issues such as pay equity, care work and household labour. Such analyses have produced accounts of how gendered and patriarchal power, for example, influence intimate relationships. And yet, the abundant work on how power operates in intimacy relationships and the inequities which persist in intimate relationships has not fully explained why such inequities persist. An emotional approach adds to our understanding of such conundrums because, as Sara Ahmed has commented, 'emotions may be crucial to showing us why transformations are so difficult (we remain invested in what

we critique), but also how they are possible (our investments move as we move)' (2004b, p.172). So, emotions draw people in and stir them to move.

In this thesis, I aim to unpack how 'norms' and social discourses are related to through love migrant couples' embodied emotional experiences (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b). Bringing love in to analyses of couple relationships can shift the focus to daily interactions in couples' lives, uncovering emotional responses to and within social structures.

Using social discourses to analyse the dynamics of intimate relationships can miss the more mundane and ordinary emotional aspects which are central to power dynamics. As Kolehmainen and Juvonen have argued,

the dynamics of intimate relationships cannot be explained or grasped by relying on predefined structures, institutions or categories — in the case of intimate relationships, 'patriarchy', 'heteronormativity', 'gendered conventions' or 'sexual orientation' make little space for noticing the mundane affective encounters which are often crucial for understanding the subtle operations of power in intimate relationships (2008, p.5)

Focusing on larger social discourses and adopting an 'anti-normative politics does not and cannot suspend the power of social norms' (Ahmed, 2004b, p.172). There is a need, then, for critical examination of social structures, such as heteronormativity, which includes everyday emotional interactions.

While much research on heteronormativity has sought to understand how gender inequalities and the forces of power operate within couple relationships, it has not explained why inequalities persist. Attention to everyday intimacies can shed light on power dynamics in intimate relationships by accessing the circulation of power in a different way. Such is the persistence of the inequalities in couple relationships, that Kolehmainen and Juvonen (2018) recently questioned why intimate relationships continue to be a site of inequality even in countries with high gender equality. They argue that the power relations in intimate relationships might be more difficult to disrupt than in other social areas and research should look beyond concerns such as equal pay, chores and care work to get at the power dynamics in the intimate sphere. They propose that researching the mundane dynamics of power in relationships can provide a new way of looking at power in relationships. Accessing the forces of power through mundane everyday encounters is a different route which can unsettle explanations based on gendered conventions and patriarchal hierarchies.

Displacing established analytic conventions, such as reverting analysis to heteronormativity or gender norms, is important, they argue, because such institutions 'insist [...] on a vertical, repressive and deterministic understanding of power and foreclose[...] any acknowledgement of the possibility of new becomings' (2018, p.6). They put forward the proposal that not all power relationships in intimate relations can be explained by reference to social structures such as heteronormativity and gender and suggest that there is 'something else about the intimate relations themselves that makes them a fertile ground for sustaining unequal practices' (2018, p.1). They advocate for a relational, embodied approach and new conceptualisations which capture power dynamic in intimate relationships. They argue for more empirical research which keeps the research subject central and focuses on 'subtle forms of force and power' (2018, p.6) which might 'feel ordinary and thus remain undifferentiated, or because their singular effects are so minimal that their accumulation can be noticed only in retrospect' (p.6). The cumulative nature of power in intimate relationships means that it is not always possible to know the cause of our emotions as we experience them. Emotions may accumulate, but they do not always cohere into easily recognisable forms which we can act upon (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b).

Following this, I understand love and emotions as entangled with gendered relations of power in couple love relationships. I am also attentive to how wider social discourses, such as heteronormativity and gender, are present in love migrants' narratives. Therefore, in this thesis, I aim to show how social discourses and embodied emotional experiences are entwined in the everyday lives of love migrant couples.

2.7 Materiality and Embodiment

Discourses are not only spoken but felt (Ahmed, 2004a; Johnson, 2005; Roseneil et al., 2020). As such, an embodied perspective is useful to explore how normative ideals feel and are experienced sensually in couple relationships. However, because research on heterosexuality has tended to focus on the institutionalisation of sex and its impact on gendered subjectivities or on non-normative forms of sex, sensuous experience has not received attention (Morrison, 2012, p.11). Carey-Ann Morrison analysed the sensuous experiences of heterosexual touch in her work on couples and the spaces of home. Morrison reminds us that touch is a 'normative' display of intimacy, but also that 'touching and being touched is important for producing

feelings of intimacy and physical closeness and can strengthen the emotional bonds between lovers' (2012, p.12). Everyday touch is not often the focus of academic work despite its importance in the performativity and processes of intimate relationships. The body is important because, as Walsh has pointed out, 'our experience of personal relationships is corporeal and emotional, and our enactment of them embodied and performative' (2018, p.34). The focus in much work on intimate relationships has been on spoken expression of feelings (e.g. Giddens, 1992), but Morrison's work draws our attention to the importance of and need for more work on the embodied and bodily aspects of love and couples.

Geographers have been particularly influential in bringing back into researchers' gaze the material and the embodied (P. Jackson, 2000; Hetherington, 2003; Anderson and Tolia-Kelly, 2004; Anderson and Wylie, 2009). Anderson and Wylie identify three 'clusters' of geographical research on materialities including on environments, on nature, science and technology and, most relevant here, on the materialities of emotion, the body, touch and the practices surrounding them (2009, p.318). In terms of research on emotion, adopting an embodied approach has meant including non-verbal aspects of people's lives, such as embodied practices. Our sex, our gender, our ethnicity, our sexuality, whether we are able or non-able bodied and so on impact how we experience love (and other aspects of our lives). These aspects can both open or limit opportunities to love and be loved.

Sara Ahmed's work on feminist theory, queer theory and critical race theory, has developed phenomenological perspectives on emotions by drawing attention to the ways that emotions affect the surface of the skin, mould the body and engulf others like a 'thickness in the air' (Ahmed, 2004b, p.10). Her interest has been on how emotions shape the surface of bodies. Her perspective on emotions aims to break down the division between inside and out, seen in psychological and sociological models of emotion, as she argues that the binary of inside and outside is a theoretical construct rather than something that exists. Ahmed says that it is emotions which create the effect or feeling of an inside/ outside boundary. She says,

In my model of sociality of emotions, I suggest that emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. So, emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others (2004b, p.10).

The objects we respond to could be material objects, or they might be less tangible,

such as memories. The objects 'become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension' (Ahmed, 2004b, p.11) these objects circulate, and we respond to them. They move, move us and create attachment (2004b, p.11). In Ahmed's view, emotions connect us to places and to other people, they do 'not cut the body off from the "where" of its inhabitation but connects bodies to other bodies: attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others' (2004b, p.11).

She argues that love is central to how we align ourselves with others. One way that we do relate to others is through identification which she explains is 'an active kind of loving, which moves or pulls the subject towards another. Identification involves the desire to get closer to others by becoming like them'. Yet identification can also arise through proximity, as Ahmed says, 'lovers often pick up each other's habits and gestures, becoming more alike as an effect of contact and desire' (2004b, p.128). She discusses how lovers sometimes want to 'fuse' with their partner, adopting their lover's habits and interests to become more alike. Within discourse on the family, likeness becomes about being similar genetically or because of cultural beliefs, for example. Focusing on likeness as a family trait normalises the assumption that heterosexual love is about difference. Lovers must 'become' similar as they are assumed to be different. Ahmed reminds us that 'heterosexuality cannot be assumed to be "about" difference or love for difference. The distinction between sameness as that which structures homosexual love, and difference as that which structures heterosexual love, needs questioning on both sides of the distinction' (2004b, p.129)

The significance of objects within couple relationships has been given less attention. Smart advocated for the inclusion of 'things' (2007, p.156) in research on personal life because they 'throw light on social relationships because of the meanings that social actors give to them' (2007, p.157). She argues for attention to be paid to the personal meanings given to items used, experienced and exchanged among intimate relations as these are as important as social understandings (2007, pp.174-177). I respond to this by focusing on the objects chosen by love migrants. I examine how objects accrue meaning over time and mediate 'the dynamics of relations of love and intimacy' (Noble, 2004, p.235) to understand the relationships between objects and love. I draw out the multi-layered emotional resonance that material culture has for love migrants and highlight ways that material possessions are meaningful in love migrant lives. My approach resonates with studies which show connections between material objects and identity, social class and taste (Bourdieu, 1984; Kopytoff, 1986; Illouz, 1997, 1998) or consumption (e.g. Miller, 1987) but adds an emotional dimension to the analysis to understand how emotional geographies are enmeshed in the material culture of love migrant lives.

As part of the methods, I used objects as a way of eliciting narratives, but the objects the

participants chose to talk about are not only a methodological tool: they are integral to the narratives. The objects help to tell and form part of the stories. Although they help the couples remember events and experiences, the objects are not only mnemonic devices. Equally, while they are symbolic of events in our lives and our relationships, the objects go beyond simply representing the past: they 'embody' (Noble, 2004, p. 247) the relationships we have. In this section I explore the ways that objects are part of participant love stories and lives.

Objects have been written about for how they can show power (Mauss, 1952/ 2002; Weiner, 1992), their role in the expression of our selves (Csíkszentmihályi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981), for how they can show difference through class, ethnicity, gender (Bourdieu, 1984), in terms of how they are consumed (Miller, 1998), and how they can express identity (Illouz, 1997). They are important in our individual biographies (Hoskins, 1998). And they show our connections to others and the wider social world (e.g. Csíkszentmihályi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Purbrick, 2003; Noble, 2004, 2010; Purbrick, 2014, 2025). Objects are also important in people's intimate lives, and they help to link us to our loved ones, family and friends (Smart, 2007; Gabb and Fink, 2015). As I will demonstrate, objects are also conduits for our emotions. They do not only display love, but they are also part of that love.

One way that objects and intimate relationships have been analysed is in terms of things which are bought for family members by other family members, in Daniel Miller's study on shopping (1998), he argues that by selecting and purchasing things for partners, children or other loved ones, people can mediate between the ideal of the person they want and the reality of the person they love. The purchase of an item brings the person closer to what the purchaser wishes their loved one was. The shopper who he discusses in his chapter 'Making Love in the Supermarket' is described as wanting to influence her husband's and children's choices. She solicits their views about what things they like and often buys these things to please them. However, she also tries to alter some of their choices to encourage them to eat more healthily, for example. Purchasing food with her family's preferences and health in mind shows, as Miller sums up, that 'shopping is primarily an act of love, that in its daily conscientiousness becomes one of the primary means by which relationships of love and care are constituted in practice' (1998, p.18). In Miller's example the choosing of objects to buy is one of the practices of love (Gabb and Fink, 2015) which people engage in.

The emphasis in Miller's study is more on the act of consuming than on the objects themselves. It explores the ways in which the shopping itself is a series of repeated events that in some way shapes the intimate relationship between loved ones. As Noble points out, the shopping should not be seen as a series of unrelated events, but as a series of acts which have 'an ongoing cumulative effect' (Noble, 2004, p.236).

The effect of accumulation is important as it speaks to the way that Noble sees subjectivity as 'layered' (2004, p. 238). That is, subjectivity should not only be seen in terms of identity and the expression of values 'but in terms of participation in temporal and spatial networks of relationships, experiences and objects' (ibid.). Following his ideas, our understandings of our selves are made and remade over time, but they are not made entirely anew each time. Our understandings of who we are build on how we saw ourselves in the past and how that relates to the present.

Csikszentmihályi and Rochberg-Halton also talk about 'cumulative effect' of objects (1981, p.86). In their analysis of household possessions, they point out that many were chosen as special objects by their participants because of 'ties to a familiar person or place' (1981, p.83). The emphasis on connection shows that objects express something of the way people relate to others and to place through objects.

As others, such as Noble, have noted, 'objects connect and include us with others' (2004, p.239) who might be contemporary family and the wider networks of family, but these connections also include younger selves and others, distant relatives from the past (Noble, 2004, p.242-3). Connections between people are not always positive. Louise Purbrick (2003) discusses how connections between people can be demonstrated through wedding presents. Many gifts show connections between the bride and groom and the giver of the gift. Often the gift reflects approval of the wedding, or lack of approval if there is a smaller than expected gift, or none. Objects given as gifts can also show connections between the giver and the family of the bride or groom. Purbrick (2003) draws our attention to a bride in her study who resented being given gifts by her mother's friends as she 'felt that they didn't know me, that in fact they were giving to her, in a way, or at least "for" her, and that it was nothing to do with me' (p.222). The connection between the bride and her mother's friends seems to be an imposition, perhaps valued more by the mother's friends and the mother than by the bride, showing that objects are not simply symbolic, they have presence and 'embody' the relations we have (Noble, 2004, p.247).

Objects show the unions we have with others. Objects embedded in our relationships can become invested with importance even if they are highly mundane (Csikszentmihályi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Purbrick, 2003; Noble, 2004). Purbrick has analysed how objects love (2025, p.167) through careful attention to items from people's everyday lives. She discusses furniture, photographs, cutlery, scraps of paper, everyday ephemera, to show that the forces they hold are experienced bodily, not only visually (p. 178). In some instances, it is the specific form of objects which makes them compelling, but objects 'appear able to absorb other experiences, gathering in what happens around them' (p.185) so, we might argue, the

emotional connection people have with objects accumulates (Noble, 2004) with time and use. Objects become suffused with experiences, emotions, presence through association with the people and places they interact with over time. As I will argue, the objects chosen by love migrant couples hold this affection and can become not only *displays* of the practices of love, but conduits through which emotion flows.

Objects are part of an 'assemblage' which brings together 'things, feelings, ideas and propositions that were previously unavailable to us' (Shaviro, 2009, pp.148-149 in Dewsbury, 2011, p.149) and allow us not only to access feeling, but to feel it. As Purbrick has put it '[o]bjects do not just perform the work of attachment; they are attachments in themselves' (2025, p.189) because, as Purbrick points out, special things have power which 'resides in their materiality, in their own evidence of existence, in the fact that they are a thing that allows them to cross the separations of time' (ibid.) and, as I will argue, across space.

2. 8 Couples in Migration Research

It is often in research on skilled migration where couples become the focus. Research on skilled migrants generally, understandably, has placed great emphasis on economic strategies, outcomes and motivations (Harvey, 1998; Huete et al., 2013; Branden, 2014; Hayes, 2014; Kõu et al., 2015; Miles, 2015; Casado and Azeredo, 2023). However, this has given social and cultural aspects less attention (Willis and Yeoh, 2002; Ryan and Mulholland, 2014) with the result that, as Kõu et al. (2015) argue, skilled migrants have been positioned as economic agents and the wider context of their lives has not been seen. Research on accompanying spouses in couple migration has engaged with social factors and shown that women who migrate to facilitate their husband's career frequently faced de-skilling and re-domestication, despite gender differences lessening in some areas of life (Yeoh and Willis, 2005). This body of research has also documented that spouses can often feel conflicted emotions about the relocation (Coles and Fechter, 2008; Walsh, 2008) although has generally not interrogated love in these relationships. The focus on one partner leading the migration and the other following has perhaps also contributed to women in skilled couple migration being depicted as, and subsequently imagined in academia as, lacking agency (Amcoff and Niedomysl, 2015).

Importantly, research on couples and research on love are not always the same. Erlinghagen's (2021) article *Love in motion: Migration patterns of internationally mobile*

couples determines that men are more likely to be lead migrants except in the case of return or 'remigration' (2021, p.2) when women tend to lead. However, despite the title, the article focuses on employment and family-related aspects of migration and does not engage explicitly with love. The elision from 'love' in the title to the couple as the subject of the research highlights how academic discourse often conflates research on couples with research on love. The assumption that researching couples and researching love indicate the same research subject has collapsed these areas and led to an uncritical approach to love and couples which has imposed heteronormative ideas on couples.

Examining the migrations of skilled migrants in broader terms (e.g. Coles and Fechter, 2008; Geddie, 2013) has produced a body of work showing how social relations and gendered contexts are integral to understanding the lives of skilled migrants and has found that economic concerns are not always the priority (Silvey and Lawson, 1999; Halfacree, 2004; Coles and Fechter, 2008; Fechter, 2008; Walsh, 2008; Fechter and Walsh, 2010; Meier, 2016; Grigoleit-Richter, 2017; Ryan, 2023), but there is still relatively little direct engagement with love in mobile couple relationships.

Scholars have urged us to incorporate emotions in the analysis of migrant lives (McKay, 2005; McKay, 2007; Conradson and McKay, 2007; Mai and King, 2009). Emotional perspectives have been brought, for example, to labour migration (Ryan, 2008; Brooks and Devasahayam, 2011; Aure, 2013) migration and gender (Pessar and Mahler, 2003; Salazar Parreñas, 2008; Montes, 2013; Vermot, 2015; Miyawaki and Hooyman, 2021), migration and sexuality (Gorman-Murray 2009; Lévy, Lieber and Jacobs, 2011), and migration and citizenship (Ho, 2009; D'Aoust, 2013).

The most prolific area of research on migration and emotion has been on family migration. This body of research has explored parenting and care giving across borders (Baldock and Wilding, 2006; Baldassar, 2007a, 2007b; Salazar Parreñas, 2008; Piquero-Balleascas, 2009; Hoang and Yeoh, 2012; Mason, 2013; Tse and Waters, 2013; Salazar Parreñas, 2014), belonging (Skrbiš, 2008), how family relationships and friendships are negotiated and maintained (Coe, 2011; Marchetti-Mercer, 2012), how particular family roles and relationships are performed (Miyawaki and Hooyman, 2021; Kara and Wrede, 2022), finding time to communicate (Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding, 2006), the need for physical co-presence in transnational relationships including how care is materialised across borders (Baldassar, 2007a, 2007b; Coe, 2011; Hoang and Yeoh, 2012; Longhurst, 2013).

Work more specifically about the *emotional* aspects of mobile couples' lives has established that emotions are important in couples' decision-making processes (Adams, 2004) and that personal relationships influence migrants' decisions to move and stay (Mueller, 2012).

This has included research on using technology to communicate (Neustaedter et al., 2015), negotiating the temporalities of relationships at distance (Acedera and Yeoh, 2019), and navigating immigration together (Casado and Azeredo, 2023), and has highlighted the complexities of spatio-temporal separation for couple relationships in mobility. Other research on couples and emotions has shown that husbands and wives do not always have the same desires and wishes, which can have an impact on their return migration (Gross, 1980; Erlinghagen, 2021).

Gaspar (2011) explored the increase of bi-national couples in a qualitative study within the EU and found love was an important and increasing motivation for people to migrate. She argued that love migration needed further investigation to evaluate its political and social impact on European integration. The complexities of navigating migration as part of a couple have been documented in research by Casado and Azeredo (2023) which explores how Brazilian couples who migrate to Auckland and Australia navigate their migration together. They show how the intricacies of the migration pathway can complicate the relationship. For example, couples may decide to get married or migrate together more quickly to facilitate the migration strategy. It may complicate the termination of a relationship because to do so would curtail their chances of gaining a particular visa. Though not the focus of their research, they acknowledge that there are migrants who persist in abusive relationships to maintain their migration strategy (e.g. Borges Jelinic, 2019).

Seeking to contribute to and develop these literatures, I will pay close attention to the emotional contexts of these love migrations, unpacking the ways that love is woven into their migrations as well as how love is performed in mobility. My aim is to balance and add texture to existing research by recognising that emotional life also shapes migrants' decisions and trajectories.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the development of an 'emotional turn' in geography alongside calls for specific engagement with love and couple relationships in the wider social sciences. Connecting this literature to research on migration highlighted how love has often been viewed through the lens of parental love and care, reflecting normative ideas about family love, often constructed around mothering (Thien, 2011). Migration research which has

engaged with couple relationships has not tended to engage directly with couple love. I argued that research on mobile couple relationships could do much more to engage with the lived emotional experiences of love. I also highlighted that researching couples and researching couple love are not inherently the same, demonstrating a need for research explicitly about love and couple migration.

Drawing on influential perspectives on love has shown that social representations and narratives of love are important in ordinary people's lives. Through attention to love and materiality I argued that the body and material culture are important in understanding, feeling and 'knowing' love both in personal life and in academic research. Presenting social narratives of love also highlighted that social discourses and personal narratives of love are contingent and embodied, so studying them through situated, reflexive methods is appropriate to avoid universalist and a-historical approaches.

This chapter has provided the theoretical and ontological foundations for the thesis, proposing a perspective that allows for embodied and contingent emotional planes to come to the fore. In presenting an outline of modern perspectives on love, I concur with others before me who have argued that these ideologies also need unpacking and situating with recourse to empirical data. In the following chapter, I draw on these perspectives to argue for a methodological approach which allows for the voices of the participants to be central and employs a creative approach to material culture.

Chapter 3. Researching Love Stories

Introduction

In this chapter I describe the focus of the research, the methodology, and the specific methods used. Inspired by feminist perspectives, the methods I used were narrative interviewing and using objects chosen by the participants to elicit narratives. I begin by describing the methods, and how they correspond to the methodological perspectives I adopt throughout the thesis. I also discuss how the specific combination of these methods created conditions in which participants spoke meaningfully about their relationships. As I chose to interview couples together, I explore how joint interviewing is beneficial in narrative research. I also explore how asking the participants to choose objects was a way of allowing them space to reflect before the interview and bringing in an embodied research element. I then discuss how I found participants and discuss the relative merits of self-selection.

3.1 Methodological Framework

The aim of the study is to explore the nature of migrants' personal lives, with the primary focus on experiences of love. Researching personal life is complex. As Gabb points out, intimate lives 'comprise defended, conflicting and emotionally messy interwoven strands of subjectivity and relationality' (2011, p.39). The personal is often experienced as oppositional to the social and may not be openly on display. These complexities require methods which can adequately elicit 'multisensory, lived, embodied, [and] felt' (Morrison et al., 2013) reflections on intimate life. Thus, methodologies suited to exploring the 'interiority' (Gabb, 2011) of couple relationships are needed.

Traditional methodological frameworks have been criticised for their 'timidity' (Latham, 2003, p.1993), which bars the way to understandings of personal life. While theoretical work has engaged with the performative, the embodied, and the sensual, appropriate methodological perspectives, it has been argued, have lagged behind (Latham, 2003, pp.1993-

1994). Latham stated that 'we simply do not have the methodological resources and skills to undertake research that takes the sensuous, embodied, creativeness of social practice seriously' (Latham, 2003, p.1994). He called for established methods to be re-invigorated with 'a sense of the creative, the practical' (Latham, 2003, p.2000). Researchers have engaged with the need for creative approaches with tactile, reflective methods, such as solicited diaries (Bijoux and Myers, 2006; Thomas, 2007; Waskul et al., 2009; Morrison, 2011, 2012; Filep et al., 2015; McDonnell et al., 2016; Baker, 2025), photo-elicitation and visual methods (Harper, 2002; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Mannay and Morgan, 2015), walking (Evans and Jones, 2011), drawing (Eldén, 2013) and emotion maps (Gabb and Singh, 2015). These experimental methods have frequently been used to research personal life.

Creative methods give participants a good degree of control over how the research data are produced and afford them a degree of reflexivity. Such methods are ones which allow researchers to approach the research through lateral thinking and can involve finding different ways of looking at problems (Kara, 2020, p.15). Creative methods do not have to be entirely new and can involve 'taking things that already exist and making new combinations' (ibid.). Rather like Denzin's bricoleur who produces emergent constructions of methods and approaches which form a 'pieced together, finely knit set of practices' tailored to each instance of research (1994, p.17).

Combining narrative interviewing with using objects is a creative method to allow space for reflective thinking which could also give the researcher and the researched access to 'emotional spaces' (Morrison, 2011, p. 69). We experience our lives and our emotions bodily, as well as intellectually, and our understandings of such rely on memory, imagination, and desire (Smart, 2007). Objects are never 'simply functional; they are always also modes of communication, or memory cues, or expressions of the psyche, or extensions of the body, as well as sites of aesthetic investment, involving pleasure, distress, or conscious indifference' (Auslander, 2005, p.1016). Asking participants only to consider their experiences linguistically, then, may miss some of the emotional and embodied experience (Bijoux and Myers, 2006). Using techniques which emphasise bodily experience, allows the participants to recall memories, not just as events, but also as emotional experiences. As Bijoux and Myers put it, 'At particular times and in particular locations there are moments in which lives are so explicitly lived through pain, bereavement, elation, anger, love and so on that the power of emotional relations cannot be ignored' (2006, p.47). Methods drawing on felt experience allow a richer understanding of lived experience. Through them, everyday social worlds can be reflected on, and performative, embodied and haptic knowledge can be mobilised (Crang, 2003, p. 494).

The first methodological resource I used was narrative interviewing, which explores the

dynamic nature of constructing meaning through story telling (Loots, Coppens and Sermijn, 2008). I opted to use narrative interviewing to interview couples together. Narrative research methodologies inform and guide both the interviewing and the analysis throughout the thesis. The second methodological resource was the selection of objects by the participants. These were used as a starting point to elicit their narrative. As a way of documenting, and thus subsequently prompting my own memory of the interviews, I also used photography to record the interaction between the couples in the interviews. These methods do not attempt to find an 'authentic' voice or the 'truth' but instead are crucial in allowing the complexity and richness of the stories to emerge.

3.2 Narrative Research

Narrative interviewing has been used quite widely in studies of migration (Shuman and Bohmer, 2004; de Fina, 2007; de Fina and King, 2011; Eggebø, 2013), and of personal life (Tamboukou, 2013). There are several strands of narrative research, which differ in their approach to interviewing, style of analysis, and theoretical assumptions. However, they are united by a focus on eliciting people's stories, rather than looking for answers to discrete questions. I adopt a narrative interviewing approach, which analyses how meaning is constructed in and through storytelling. There are several reasons for choosing narrative interviewing.

Firstly, narrative research involves gathering people's stories as told by them. It is an unstructured way of interviewing which, while organised around topics central to the research, lets participants 'grapple with unresolved life experience' (Ochs and Capps, 2001, p.57) and allows room for the participants to shape the conversation. Making space for participants to talk about what is important to them is crucial because the point of researching personal life is precisely to pay heed to the voices of the participants.

Secondly, narrative allows for meaning to be negotiated as the story is told. It encompasses the dynamic nature of experience and acknowledges that the stories people tell are told in a particular point in their lives, to a particular audience, for a particular purpose (Phoenix, 2008), and at a particular time (Plummer, 1995). The underlying theoretical assumption in my thesis is that knowledge is situated (Rose, 1997). Therefore, while some view narrative as a 'window' onto a knowable reality, I adopt a position informed by feminist

reflexive research which positions narrative as collaboratively produced, and context dependent. Thus, the emphasis is on the co-construction of meaning.

The third reason for choosing the narrative method was that it brings together theory and practice (Squire, 2005), as analysis happens throughout the research process, and meaning can be co-constructed among the participants and researcher (Andrews et al., 2008). Therefore, an emphasis on collaboration unsettles established power relationships between the researcher and the researched. An emphasis on reflexivity is in line with the feminist position I adopt, as it exposes how we, as researchers, come to know what we know (England, 1994; Rose, 1997).

There are differing views about the degree to which we experience life, and then recount it, or construct our experiences through narrative (Ricoeur, 1991). However, memory, imagination (Andrews, 2014), and ambiguity are integral to 'narrative knowing' (Polkinghorne, 1988). As such, narrative research challenges positivist views about knowledge, and includes the ambiguities, complexities, and 'messiness' of everyday life (Salmon and Riessman, 2008). A fourth reason for using narrative interviews, then, is that researchers can gather richly textured, complex and nuanced accounts of how people understand aspects of their lives and worlds. It is precisely the inherent messiness, depth, and texture, which is the value of narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Finally, the kinds of experiences which I sought to understand lend themselves well to storied narratives. Meeting someone, falling in love, migrating, in some cases marrying, or separating, are all 'fateful moments' (Giddens, 1991). Major biographical events can invigorate, and disrupt, but are frequently highly emotional for most people, so narrative seemed to be a good way to ask people to recount these important events. Participants select, organise, and connect their experiences to recount in their narrative (Riessman, 1993; Chase, 2005, p.656). Thus, narratives are pieced together from events, which may be disconnected by time and space, in lived experiences. Narratives are presented in ways which seek to preserve their integrity, and which convey a sense of the narrator's experience (Etherington, 2004, p.80). And, constructing coherence, maintaining integrity, attributing blame, or preserving credibility are discourses which may be mobilised by narrators (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) to achieve different narrative effects. Researchers try to understand how pieces of stories make sense together, while retaining a sense of the overall narrative.

Personal narratives can capture the relations between private experience and more public, social worlds (Jones, Jackson and Rhys-Taylor, 2014), showing how emotions and personal narratives are connected to 'power, the circulation of feeling and the production of spaces and places' (Jones, Jackson and Rhys-Taylor, 2014, p.3). As the personal is always

embedded in the wider social and political contexts, narrative research is a fitting method. Emotions circulate and stick to places, objects, people (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b). Within a framework that posits emotions as relational, telling a personal story not only communicates personal experiences but produces and reproduces complex layers of feeling and power.

Concerns with using narrative often relate to narrators being overly conscious in how they present themselves. Self-consciousness can lead, it is argued, to narrators over-elaborating, or missing out details to create a more positive account, or to protect themselves and others (Aquilino, 1993). However, I was not particularly apprehensive about couples 'editing' their narratives because my study sought to understand how couples narrate their experiences, and how they mobilise discourses which circulate in wider social contexts (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Maynes, Pierce and Laslett, 2008). With the emphasis on personal accounts of emotional experience and personal life, the worry was more that people would be reluctant to reveal personal information about themselves. I recruited through self-selection, which meant participants were eager to take part, and generally willing to talk about their relationship.

3.2.1 Joint Interviews

While interviews are not normal conversations, I approached the interviews in a relaxed way, not worried about having to cover a set number of specified topics. Beforehand I had prepared a list of topics and prompts which would be useful if the participants needed guidance about what to say. I found that any initial nerves on their part were assuaged once they began talking together about their object. As participants spoke, I remembered points that I wanted them to go back to, and to say more about. I tried to let the main topics of the interview be led by the participants. If I noticed that the couple had said nothing, or very little, on what I viewed as central topics, such as family, or migration, I would prompt them to say something about that. Sometimes, my encouragements led to valuable interview material. If the participants either did not want to say more about a topic, or simply did not find it interesting, I allowed the themes to drop. Being flexible and attentive to signals from the participants allowed them to have some control over their narrative, and to let their stories 'breathe' (Frank, 2010) and not be over-prescribed by the researcher.

I opted to interview participants together. I chose to do joint interviews firstly because,

as the participants are in a love relationship, they can be said to share at least some of that experience. I do not assume that the participants share every aspect of their relationship or that they would necessarily share opinions or agree about the experiences they have had. However, I take love to be mutually constructed and part of an 'intersubjective experience' which is 'how humans share experiences and how they depend on each other to construct and make sense of these experiences' (Sakellariou et al., 2013, p.1565). Therefore, people share their intersubjective experiences through narrative and narrating our lives is part of that experience. In joint interviews people can make sense of experiences together, because they interpret experiences and convey meaning not only to themselves but also to somebody else with whom they are sharing these experiences (Sakellariou et al., 2013, p.1566). Thus, the joint interview is an appropriate method to use when researchers want to explore the shared nature of experiences (Morris, 2001; Radcliffe et al., 2013).

The shared nature of joint interviews has led to the criticism that couples will strive to agree (Aquilino, 1993). It has been argued that spousal presence in an interview leads to 'socially desirable responding' (Aquilino, 1993, p.359) which is that each partner will give answers intended to please their partner. Researchers have also been concerned that couples will try to present themselves as a 'unified' couple to the researcher (Zipp and Toth, 2002). These researchers seem concerned that, in a joint interview, the couple will exaggerate agreement to present their relationship in a good light.

Couples who wish to present an image of a 'successful' relationship to the interviewer may well disagree with each other, though, as in the rhetoric of 'healthy' relationships in contemporary Western Europe, it may be desirable that both partners hold their own opinions. Disagreements, then, do not always equal disharmony. Other researchers, such as Bjornholt and Farstad (2014), who have experience of interviewing couples together, claim that couples do disagree, and their research aligns with my own experience. As Valentine points out, couples frequently disagree in joint interviews, and their disagreements reveal the strategies that partners use to align themselves with, or undermine their partner (1999, p.69). When one partner engages in what Valentine (1999), borrowing from Levy (1981), calls 'imaginative generalizations', which are idealised accounts, the other partner may find ways of revealing the inaccuracies. Thus, through interacting and responding to each other's accounts, participants in a joint interview can create a more nuanced, richer narrative.

Another criticism related to the shared experience is that participants will not reveal the 'truth' in the presence of another interviewee; they will agree a story to tell the interviewer. Hertz, for example, represents some of the scepticism about interviewing people together. She suggested that 'marital secrets can only be revealed when the other spouse is

not present' (1995, p. 441). Her pronouncement assumes, firstly, that there are marital secrets, and secondly that only through their revelation can the research said to be successful. Hertz' criticism also clings to the idea that there is an objective truth revealed by the interview, whereas my approach, as outlined earlier, is to view the narrative as a performance, or tool for display.

However, much feminist work, which was being produced around the time that Hertz (1995) was writing, has challenged the idea that there is an inner truth which can be revealed in interviews (e.g. Butler, 1997). As such, there are significant strands of research which no longer adhere to such ideas. As Bjornholt and Farstad (2014) have suggested, the self is relational and interviews are 'co-produced' and 'not seen as exact representations of "real" experiences but as constructions, narratives or stories produced in the specific context of the research interview' (2014, pp.4-5). Narrative interviewing with couples together is sensitive to a relational worldview. Moreover, narrative research is not about 'fact checking' participants' narratives but seeks to understand how people narrate their lives.

A further concern is that to present a 'unified' front to the researcher, the couple may have discussed what to say and what not to say beforehand. I found that couples talking about the interview beforehand happened frequently. However, prior discussion did not always mean that the couple has agreed to cover things up. As an example, a couple in the study revealed that they had met on Tinder. When they told me, they also revealed that they do not usually tell people, as one partner is quite embarrassed about it. They explained that they had talked about whether to tell me or not before the interview and had decided that if they were going to take part, they should be open about their relationship. Theirs provides a contrasting example to the view that couples will collude to hide details or misrepresent their relationship.

On the other hand, the joint interview can provide rich interview material (Philpin et al., 2005). As Valentine (1999, p.68) argues, '[o]ne strength of joint interviewing is that a process of negotiation and mediation takes place between couples in the production of a single collaborative account for the interview which can provide material or insights into the dynamics of the household that would be difficult to identify in a one-to-one interview'. The couple can prompt each other's and jog their partner's memory; they can interrupt, correct, and show agreement and disagreement. All of which are interactions that would not be available to the interviewer if the partners were interviewed separately. In fact, when couples interact with each other, the researcher 'can become observer if one partner takes over the questioning' (Bjornholt and Farstad, 2014, p.9). Thus, the researcher can observe the interactions of the couple as they narrate, which Finch calls a 'tool for display' (2007, p.77), and thus communicate the 'character' of the family, or couple in relation to my research. The

researcher is privy to some of the ways that each participant affirms their identity, and their place in the relationship.

Finally interviewing participants together allays many ethical concerns about researching intimate life. How to manage disagreement and tensions that arise in joint interviews has, quite rightly, raised considerable concern for researchers interviewing couples. Disagreements between participants in a joint interview can create 'an ethical minefield' for the interviewer, according to Valentine (1999, p.70), which might need careful handling so that the interviewer is not seen to take sides, or to leave one participant in a vulnerable position. If one participant tries to get the interviewer to side with them, the interviewer may feel 'stuck in the middle' (Forbat and Henderson, 2007, p.1453), as though being asked to adjudicate, or provide an answer to the problem. Disagreements can also lead to one partner silencing the other (Valentine, 1999). However, an upside to these ethical quandaries is that in a joint interview the disagreement can be negotiated immediately in the interview, in the researcher's presence. The process of negotiation is revealed to the interviewer, providing interesting material (Bjornholt and Farstad, 2014, p.11). Being given the chance to negotiate their views and arrive at an agreement, or not, gives the participants substantial control over the narrative, and of how they are represented.

When researching couples, the joint interview also removes dilemmas about anonymity, which is particularly pertinent in the case of disagreements. In their article about researching couples by means of individual interviews, Forbat and Henderson (2007) present the complex ethical considerations for researchers when interviewing both partners separately. They demonstrate that when conflict does arise in the two narratives, presenting the data becomes 'an ethical minefield'; if partners' narratives are presented together, then the anonymity between participants is broken once one partner recognises their own words. Joint couple interviews mean that both parties are aware of which information has become 'public', and of the other's views.

When the research subject is the relationship, joint interviews provide a valuable means to access it (Bjornholt and Farstad, 2014, p.15) because discussions between the couple show how they interact. Interviews, whether individual or joint, cannot be presumed to reveal everything, and there will always be information, which is not revealed to the researcher, and may be unknown to the participants; we cannot know everything about ourselves, and cannot articulate every aspect of our lives. Relationships are 'complex [and] uncertain objects' (Gabb and Fink, 2015, p.2) and the notion that parts of participants' lives remain out of reach should be accepted as an integral part of research. Finally, the joint interview provides data pertinent both to couple and to individuals. Joint interviews do not only provide a joint narrative, but

there are also individual points of view. Interviewing partners together can reveal the multiple discourses which may be present in a single narrative.

3.2.2 Performing Love Relationships

Within research that sees narrative as co-constructed, narrative is part of the performance of identity. Butler's work on performativity has placed gender and identity as something people 'do', rather than have (Butler, 1993) and has demonstrated that gender is constituted through every day, repeated acts. Her work has been critiqued for the inherent contradictions which some see in it (Nussbaum, 1999), for being too 'abstract for its focus on language' (Bordo, 1993), and thus ignoring the body (Hansen, 2006), but Butler's perspective has been influential and it is now widely acknowledged that identity is not fixed but is constrained by social circumstances. Such approaches, however, have tended to focus on individuals. Existing research does not describe adequately how people who consider themselves as a couple, or larger group, might perform that shared identity, or individual identities within larger units.

The tension between how a relationship is seen by and displayed to outsiders (Finch, 2007; Gabb, 2011), and how it is experienced and displayed from within leads to important questions about what methodological and theoretical approaches might best allow the researcher access to the 'interiority' (Gabb, 2011, p. 39) of relationships. These considerations are part of the complexity involved in researching personal life. As such, we need to be attentive not only to the narratives which are displayed, but also to what may remain hidden and personal (Gabb, 2011).

Paying heed to the practices which couples talk about in their stories, is a way of understanding 'alternative modalities of love' (Gabb, 2011, p. 51) and accessing the interiority of the relationship. Alternative modalities may not be immediately recognisable to the researcher as displays of love. However, within the relationship these modalities may be an essential part of how love is displayed. Using the concept of display, with the caveats Gabb (2011) provides, can help researchers understand not only what is on display, but also what remains hidden. She argues that expanding research capacity to engage with 'wordless modalities' is what can give voice to those who are otherwise silenced in mainstream culture.

3.2.3 Positionality

Within the framework of feminist reflexive research, it is important to interrogate the dynamics of the interview situation, to understand the positionality of both the researcher and the researched (Rose, 1997). Positionality is pertinent when studying personal life. As feminist scholarship has shown, the researcher and the participants negotiate identities and positionality over the course of the interview. Researchers cannot remain outside the research process and therefore inevitably influence the production of knowledge (Denzin, 1994). Recognising the social factors and 'specific markers' (Carling et al., 2014, p.44) which affect the positionality of the researcher, permits meaningful reflection on how the interview materials were produced.

The insider/ outsider binary used as an indicator of the relative position of the researcher and researched takes social categories as markers of difference and similarity (Carling et al., 2014). Thus, if the researcher shares cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, and national heritage with the participants, they might be assumed to be 'insiders' (Ganga and Scott, 2006). In migration studies research, in particular, the outsider could be a member of the majority population in the host country, and an insider could be a member of the migrant community, but insider/ outsider status works in relation to the positionality of the subject (Carling et al., 2014, p.36). However, the insider position is not always desirable and should not always be determined through ethno-nationality (2014, p.38). Adopting a more dynamic view of the nature of insiderness can show how propinquity between researcher and participants shifts over the course of the interview.

Taking ethno-national origin as the main marker of identity essentialises and simplifies the ways that identity is made and remade (Carling et al., 2014). Just as the nation-state should not be assumed to contain a homogenous group, nor should ethno-national groupings be thought of as constant (Nowicka and Cieslik, 2014, p.3). Using one facet of identity (usually ethno-nationality) as the main indicator of identity is 'reflective of epistemological nationalism, historically pervasive in migration research' (Matejskova, 2014). Social categories are discursively constructed, and both researcher and researched are located within them. But these categories are also (re)constructed relationally and can be negotiated over the course of the research. There are also many more nuanced positions than a binary perspective allows. Complex interactions are made clearer by understanding the markers which define the position of the researcher, such as those noted by Carling et al. (2014, pp.44-45), 'name, occupation

and title, gender, age group, physical appearance, clothing style, parenthood, visible pregnancy, language skills, language used, cultural competence, sustained commitment, religion, migration experiences’.

On several occasions during my fieldwork, my participants assumed I was French, or francophone, because of my first name. Assumptions about my own ethno-nationality did not automatically afford me any insider or outsider status, however, as such status is dependent also on their own positionality regarding French-speaking people. My ability to speak Spanish, if revealed, sometimes positioned me as more of a cultural insider. Therefore, I was sometimes positioned as ‘honorary insider’ (Carling et al., 2014, p.50) by the Spanish-speaking partner¹. My own experiences, as someone who has travelled, and who has had relationships in and across different countries, positioned me as an insider to participants who had also travelled. My insider positionality became most clear when I shared an anecdote about my own life, which reflected what the couple had been saying. Often talking about myself encouraged them to re-animate their own conversation with further details.

At other times, my gender gave me insider status on occasions when I was called on to understand a ‘female perspective’. At various times I was a fellow migrant, fellow Spanish speaker, fellow French or Spanish learner, fellow foreigner, and fellow love migrant. I was sometimes co-opted as the fellow British person, to share a cultural anecdote, or a joke. Moreover, these positions could be mobilised and disregarded throughout the interview. In my research with couples, the constantly changing positionality meant that across the interview I was at times co-opted with one partner, and then later with the other. It was not only my position which shifted in the interviews, but the participants’ as well, because as I was being constructed as a fellow female, for example, whilst the male was positioned at that moment as the outsider. These points show how the dynamic of insider and outsider unfolds over the course of the interview. They illustrate the ‘incomplete and unstable nature of insiderness’ (O’Connor, 2004, p.169), and how normative categories unravel through interaction.

An insider position is generally met with positive appraisal in academic research. It is assumed that the research is ‘more attentive to the sensibilities of immigrant communities’ (Matejskova, 2014, p.18), because it is not being produced by the majority society. However, an insider position is not synonymous with proximity to participants’ ideas and sympathies. Moreover, the dynamic nature of ‘insiderness’ means that positionality shifts and changes

¹ My experience with Barcelona locals was different, however. Having lived in Mexico for 10 years, I speak Mexican Spanish with an accent which is often noticeable to Spanish people. On several occasions I was mocked for speaking Mexican Spanish and was subject to racist comments including being addressed with a racial slur by Barcelona residents. In these instances I was most certainly an outsider.

throughout the course of the interview.

While Ganga and Scott (2006) argue that, as an insider, the researcher shares cultural knowledge with his or her participants, I did not always feel that I had similar perspectives. In one interview, I was being positioned as an insider by one participant, who was also British, and a similar age to me. I was being encouraged to agree with the participant about certain characteristics of both British people, and the host nationals, neither of which I recognised or agreed with. My discomfort in that situation illustrates how insider and outsider are not objective categories based on ethnic, linguistic, and religious factors. Insider and outsider are imagined positions, which may, or may not, be shared by the people in the groups. Being viewed by participants as an insider can be useful, as it can 'make us accepted within the group' (Ganga and Scott, 2006), but sharing cultural markers should not be assumed to mean shared views or understandings.

Being seen as an insider can have the further drawback of participants assuming that you understand what they mean and not explaining their thoughts fully (Matejskova, 2014, p.13). When I noticed moments where participants seemed to assume I had understood, I would ask participants to explain further. My request was met with odd looks sometimes, indicating that they didn't understand why I needed more details. I would tell them explicitly that, as a researcher, I cannot simply assume that I have understood, and that, if possible, I needed them to say things in their own words. When I made it clear that I was trying to avoid putting words into their mouths, so to speak, participants responded generously by fleshing out ideas where they could.

While acknowledging my own position as researcher, I am also aware that I do not have a completely transparent view on the research. Reflexivity in research has been lauded for unpicking the so-called god trick (Rose, 1997). However, it has been criticised for making too much claim to clear understanding. Reflexivity also needs to allow for its own limitations; otherwise, it could be seen as a 'back door for the god trick claiming to understand not only the lives of our research participants but even our own relations and limitations within the field' (Smith, 2016, p.137). There will perhaps always be some aspects of our lives which are not known to us, and which are not knowable through research. In other words, research is always necessarily partial, and there are always limitations on our knowledge, no matter how reflexive we might be.

3.3 New Ways of Seeing and Feeling

Using objects in the interviews has some similarity with methods which deploy images because they both 'mine deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews' (Harper, 2002, p. 23), and they tap into information about 'feelings and memories' (p.13). However, photos are not always successful at stimulating pertinent responses. In Harper's research with farmers, images of the landscape as the farmers experienced it daily had not encouraged them to reflect. It was only aerial views and historical photos of the landscape, which elicited the reflective responses he had hoped for. The images which could '*break the frame* of farmers' normal views' (2002, p.20, emphasis in original) were ones which showed everyday life from unusual perspectives. The responses elicited by unfamiliar views suggest that it is the consideration of ordinary aspects of our own daily lives through new standpoints that sparks engaged, creative reflections and not anything intrinsic to the image. As Clark-Ibañez has commented, 'there is nothing inherently interesting about photographs; instead, photographs act as a medium of communication between researcher and participant' (2004, p.1512). Thus, thinking in novel ways about daily life encourages people to draw on feelings and emotional experience.

Research carried out with solicited diaries and self-directed photography seems to support the idea that different perspectives can provoke thoughtful reflection. Studies in which participants have been asked to reflect on their daily lives through short phases of intensive diary keeping encourage them to consider details which, in usual circumstances, might have gone unnoticed. Morrison's (2011, 2012) research about everyday touching in the home employed solicited diaries and self-directed photography. The diary method gave participants space to see the everyday afresh. One wrote, 'It helped me to recognise many little things that Mark does that I often take for granted and kept them at the forefront of my mind' (Morrison, 2011, p.73). Finding ways for participants to consider taken-for-granted aspects of their lives in new light is an effective way to focus participants on the minutiae of their present, everyday lives.

I wanted to focus participants on their own relationship, and to talk about it in meaningful terms for them. Therefore, I asked couples to choose an object which had meaning for both partners. The object was used as a starting point for the conversation. The wording of the request for couples to choose an object was as follows: 'The interviews are for couples together, and I'm asking each couple to choose an object which has some meaning for both of

you in the context of your relationship (one object together, not one each). We use this as the starting point for the interview'. The wording was considered to try to avoid prescribing what sort of object they should select.

Embodiment is important in most research contexts. Some methods, such as ethnography, are more noticeably embodied and while the embodied aspect is not always a central focus, some ethnographic research has been carried out with an explicit focus on embodied dimensions (e.g. Finlay, 2021). Embodied research methods have been used in areas where the body is a central focus of research, such as in healthcare contexts (e.g. Ellingson, 2017). Embodied methods are appropriate in research which adopts a reflexive approach, but Kara has pointed out that 'even authors who make a point of championing reflexivity express it as a primarily cognitive exercise, sometimes with a side order of emotion, but no acknowledgement of the body and its role' (2020, p.32). Thus, foregrounding emotion and the body are intrinsic to an embodied perspective. As knowledge is situated, our bodies are central to the way knowledge is constructed. In interviews the objects created a tactile, sensory focus. Even if the objects themselves were not particularly sensuous (a metal coffee pot, for example, although the strong smell of coffee was part of a sensory experience), they brought back sensuous and visceral memories.

3.4 Objects

I asked couples to select an object as a means of eliciting a narrative and as a way of providing a tactile, material and reflective experience. Because I was asking participants to reflect on a tactile object, my method shares some characteristics with photo-elicitation and self-directed photography. In photo-elicitation, participants talk about photographs provided either by the researcher or the participant(s). In self-directed photography, participants are provided with cameras to document various aspects of their lives and then the images are discussed in an interview (Bijoux and Myers, 2006; Morrison, 2012). Visual approaches add complexity, richness and depth to the research (Bijoux and Myers, 2006, p.48) by providing a non-verbal element to reflect on.

Introducing personal objects to the research extends the complexity afforded by visual approaches and brings in a further tactile and sensory element. Objects have been used in migration research on home and have shown how objects can shape local environments

through their embeddedness in memories of place (Tolia-Kelly, 2004). Objects have been shown to connect the material and immaterial aspects of home and belonging (Walsh, 2006b). The aesthetic qualities of materialities in migrant homes can reflect relationships and show 'warmth, empathy and comfort' (Miller, 2006, p.247). Migrant homes have been shown to be spaces for negotiating emotional connections to place and to futures (Drazin, 2014). Migrant homes have been viewed as 'windows' on transnational belonging (Boccagni, 2014). Objects are also involved in the pursuit for 'authenticity' in the home-making practices of later-life lifestyle migrants (King, Cela, Fokkema and Morettini, 2021). Having the objects (rather than a photo of the object) in the interview allowed love migrant couples to contemplate and interact with the objects. Couples held, touched, displayed and fiddled with the objects which drew attention to the embodied form of the methodology. Having these personal objects present drew attention to the interactions between bodies, both human and non-human in the interview. Finlay has described the body as a 'detector of meaning' which can help the researcher interpret physical sensations and our own felt-sense arising out of the relational space *between* participants (2014, p.6 emphasis in original). In my research, these in-between spaces included the objects. Some objects were offered to me so I could have a closer look, a framed photograph for example. Other objects were kept close to the couple, held and caressed by them but not given to me, highlighting how some objects were highly personal. The objects chosen by participants had become more than their material form (Noble, 2004) by being imbued with meaning associated with touch. The presence of these personal items drew attention to the nature of touch, as some of these objects were too personal for me to touch them.

Notwithstanding, there were two couples who did not choose an object to bring to talk about in the interview. They noted that all their possessions could be their object. In other words, they could not choose a single object because the material world which surrounds them is important in its entirety. The idea of singling out any one object seemed overwhelming to them.

3.4.1 Tools for Display

Using objects seemed to be an appropriate method as it brought in tactile and creative elements to the interview. The objects could be said to 'break the frame' of how they think

about their relationship, by asking them to consider it in terms which they have not done before and so elicit reflective comments. It was also in keeping with phenomenological theories, which underpin the project, as phenomenology posits experience as about encounters with things. Furthermore, as Finch (2007) has said, narratives and objects are both tools for 'display'. Her work on inheritance shows how passing on 'keepsakes' with little monetary value is a way of symbolising the importance of the relationship between the deceased and the inheritor (Finch and Mason, 1993).

Miller (2009) has also shown how objects are an integral part of people's life narratives, as well as how people appropriate material culture when going through traumatic experiences (Miller and Parrot, 2009). Objects are used as a means of self-expression (Csíkszentmihályi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981) and are often crucial in our relationships with others (Miller, 2009, p.1). They can be 'repositories of affection' (Purbrick, 2014, p.11), and emotional objects are objects which are invested with value other than monetary value, and whose significance is personal (Kopytoff, 1986, p.83). Importantly, researchers have shown how objects 'reveal in a multifaceted way different situations in which love becomes central as an emotion' (Margolin, 2014, p.2). Objects, then, seemed to offer a highly relevant potential in a study about love.

Photo-elicitation and solicited diary methods have the advantage of being 'auto driven' (Clark, 1999) by the participants, as photographs provide prompts for the participants to talk about. They allow the participants to select aspects of their lives to share, and to have control over how these aspects are represented (Clark-Ibañez, 2004). The objects function like the photographs in some ways, as the couple had control over where their story began. The method I chose is distinct from self-directed photography and solicited diaries, though, as I asked my participants to choose something which already existed prior to the interview, and which will continue to be part of their lives beyond the project. Using objects as a starting point meant that the narratives were not 'straightforward' chronological accounts.

With the object as a place to start the narrative, couples were not drawn to what they might instinctively do, which is to start at the 'beginning'. A few couples started at a point before their chosen object came into their lives and built up to it; whatever their preferred narrative technique, the combination of narrative interviewing and objects method allowed them to be in control of their story. Narratives usually involve some temporal ordering (Salmon and Riessman, 2008), but perhaps my technique allowed participants to be less constrained. My approach encouraged flexibility and creativity but also generated 'messy' narratives some of which were complicated to analyse. However, talking about the objects enabled participants to recall and include details and observations which they might otherwise have left out. Using

objects generated rich, emotive interview material which provided access to emotional aspects of their lives. The objects also allowed the participants to show, rather than just describe, something which is relevant to their relationships (Clark and Emmel, 2010).

3.4.2 Choosing Objects

Choosing an object was something that the couple could think through and talk about before the interview. Considering the interview beforehand facilitated the interviews to some extent. When I arrived for interviews, participants usually had many ideas about what they wanted to tell me. Their prior reflection seemed to help to start many of the interviews, as it gave the couple some confidence that they would have something to say. It also deflected the attention away from them directly; they were able to talk about the object, rather than immediately, and perhaps self-consciously, focus on themselves.

The guidelines for choosing an object allowed each couple to interpret them in different ways. Allowing couples space for creativity in choosing objects seemed to inspire couples to tell their story. The objects functioned well as prompts, perhaps, because 'material culture carries emotions and ideas of startling intensity' (Turtle, 2007, p.6) and facilitated the recall of details and feelings. As Turtle puts it, 'objects bring together thought and feeling' and can be used as 'thought companions' (2007, p.9). Purbrick (2014) has shown how objects have mnemonic power, and that the context in which objects are encountered is more important than the physical properties of the objects.

Participants seemed to enjoy taking part in the interviews overall. The interview provided a space for them to talk about an aspect of their relationship which had, for many couples, gone unremarked upon by others. One participant said she 'remember[ed] looking online and trying to find things where people had talked about their experience' but had not found stories that resonated with her own experiences, so she was glad to learn that love migration 'was really a thing'.

Several couples got into the experience of narrating their experiences by illustrating their migration pathways. One couple drew a timeline of where they had travelled together for their relationship:

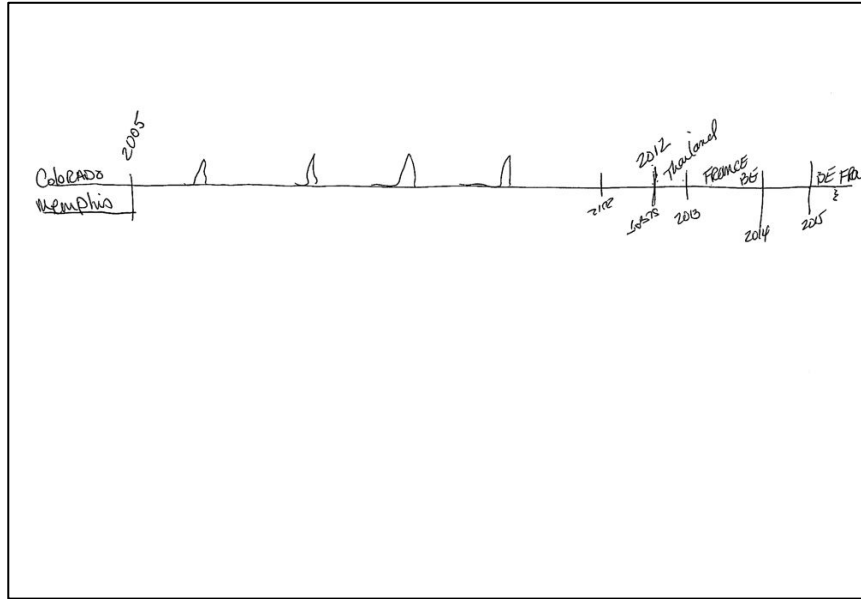


Figure 3.1 A timeline drawn by a love migrant couple

Two couples drew maps showing where they had travelled and when:

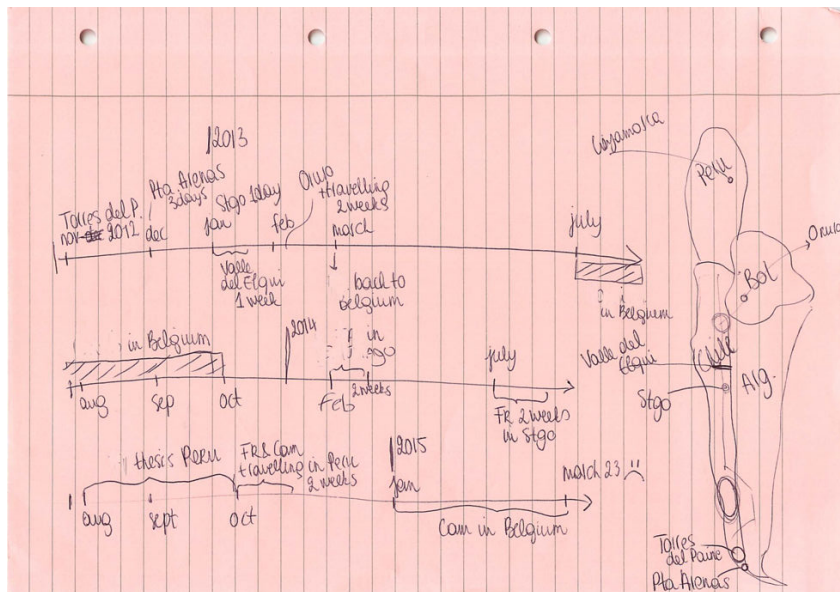


Figure 3.2 A timeline and map of a love migrant relationship

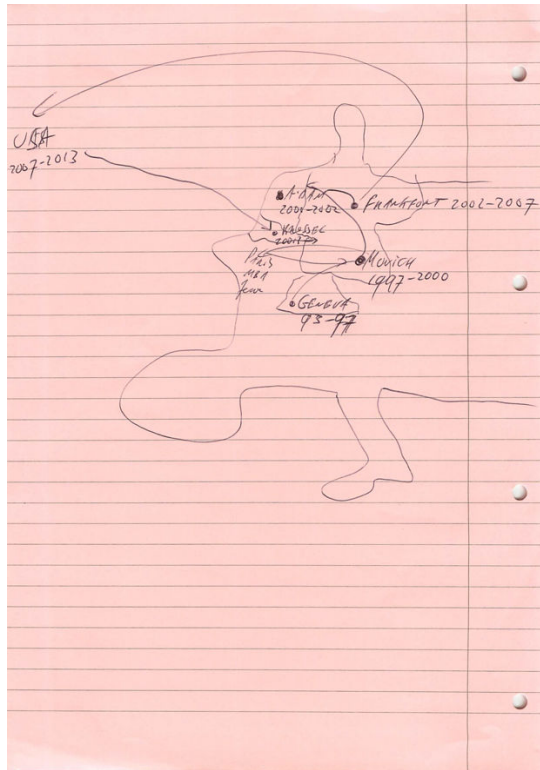


Figure 3.3 A timeline and map of a love migration relationship

Another couple drew a timeline showing different phases of their relationship and how these related to place:

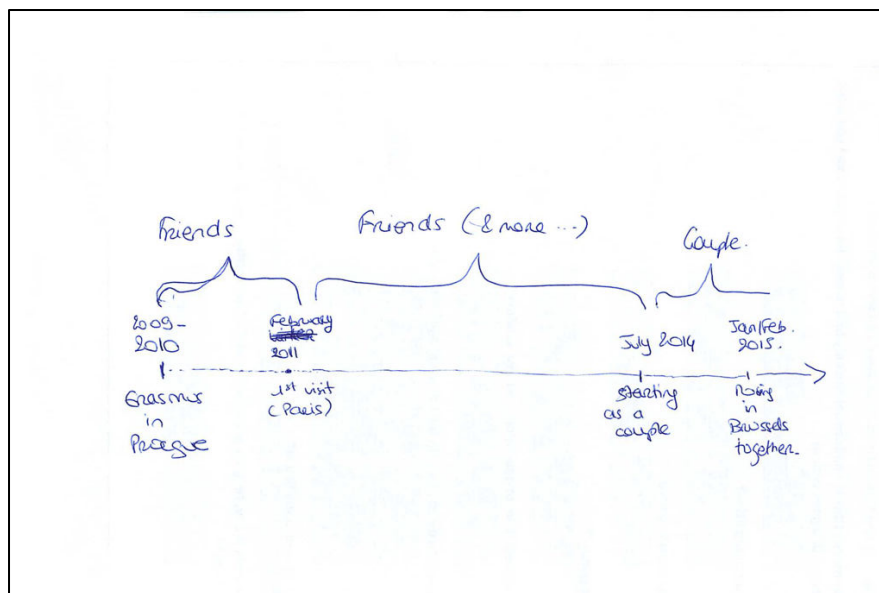


Figure 3.4 A timeline of the development of a love migration relationship

The drawings were helpful in some cases as way of understanding where the participants had been. Watching them negotiate and draw together to find ways of representing their

relationships in visual ways was also interesting. For some participants, drawing and doodling with the pen seemed to facilitate their narration, not just in terms of remembering but also in giving them a tool through which to speak.

3.5 Finding Love Migrants

The study required finding people who had moved for love and in this section, I describe recruitment methods. As love is not particular to social class, sexual orientation, nationality, age and so on, there was no easily definable target group.

Participants responded to advertisements posted on social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, and to articles I wrote for various websites. One organisation, The Europe Brussels Liaison Office, was particularly interested in the project, and they featured a short publicity article in their newsletter. They also put me in touch with a local radio journalist, who interviewed me about the project. These outlets had a wide reach, and several people contacted me as a result. I put flyers in coffee shops, cafés, bookshops, and on walls and in doorways. I attended coffee mornings, knitting groups, and 'expat' events².

One concern was to try to reach a broad cross-section of migrants. I posted on Facebook, advertising on a wide range of pages for people with different interests. I also used paid Facebook and Google advertising, targeted at couples in each city. The advertising was 'pay-per-click', and the resulting cost was around £150 in total, £100 of which was paid for with a voucher. The advertising generated significant traffic to the project website (www.lovemigrationproject.com), and several participants contacted me through the website. I contacted anyone who had 'liked' a post on Facebook or advert related to the project, which also found several participants. The website allowed people to find about the project and contact me. Many of the couples who participated said the website made them want to be part of it. They could see others like them on the website and wanted to show they were part of a love migrant community.

Academic research has tended to move away from the idea of migration as a grand,

² An online questionnaire was used as an additional but unsuccessful recruitment method. It prompted participants to write a brief account of their love migration. They were asked to leave their email addresses if they would be willing to do a follow up interview. However, it generated a lot of spam responses and so was abandoned before any in-person participant recruitment and interviewing began.

one-way movement. More complex analytical frameworks which emphasise the circular, seasonal, multiple nature of migration (e.g. Sheller and Urry, 2006; Cohen and Sirkeci, 2011) are preferred. Despite shifts in terminology, I chose to use the word migration in the publicity for the project, firstly because I wanted to attract the public, and the word migration is much more accessible than a term such as 'new mobilities' or 'transnationalism' which may have put some people off. Secondly, when modified by the word 'love', it straightforwardly represents a phenomenon which many people related to.

Indeed, for some of the same reasons academics have opted for other terms to depict the intricacies of mobility, love migration as a term seemed to have a certain allure. Whereas mobility implies continuous movement and is more politically neutral (King and Williams, 2018, p.4), migration 'implies that the migrants will stay for some time, perhaps permanently' (ibid.). The term migration might also resonate with imaginings and fantasies that the participants had about their relationships because they were migrating toward a relationship which they hoped would be lasting, rather than temporary. Aspiring to a lasting couple relationship distinguishes love migrants from those who seek an escape from the monotony of relationships at home (Walsh, 2007) and pursue 'transient' relationships, and from migrants who do not want to pursue relationships because of the temporary and transient nature of their own migrations (Gauthier, 2017).

3.5.1 Self-Selection

Participants were self-selecting, as they chose to respond to (or ignore) the various ways I publicised the project. Some participants contacted me through the project website. Others I met at groups for migrants. In Brussels, I also attended a two-month French course, where I found two participants. One more responded to a flyer I had left in the foyer of the language school. Participants often put me in touch with other people they knew, so the sample 'snowballed'.

Concerns about small, interview-based studies, are that they unlikely to be representative. However, the objective of my research is not to generalise about how widespread the phenomenon of love migration is in Europe, so a small sample did not pose a problem. Rather, my aim is firstly, to document the experiences of a group of migrants, which until now have not been included on the research agenda. Secondly, it is to gather rich,

narrative data, which contributes to theoretical and conceptual development about migration and love.

Participants voluntarily selected to take part, which is important in research which asks people to talk about their personal lives. It also meant that people were generally keen to talk about the subject. A downside to using self-selection as a recruitment method, though, is 'over-sampling' people with strong feelings about the topic. People who have a romantic view of their life or relationship may have been more likely to respond to a call to be part of the 'Love Migration Project'.

3.6 Ethical Research

The participants shared stories about their intimate lives which included substantial amounts of personal information, beliefs, vulnerabilities and relationship practices which were not always known by people closest to the couples. Their trust in me as a researcher brought considerable responsibility to respect their stories and protect their anonymity.

After I had made initial contact with participants, I gave participants a Participant Information Sheet about the project (APPENDIX C) which outlined how the interview would take place and their rights regarding taking part. I spent time with them before the interview, sometimes in separate meetings and sometimes in the same session of the interview, explaining the formalities of the interview. I was clear that they could take breaks or end the interview at any time, although none did. Participants also had contact details if they wanted to get in touch with me after the interview. Several made use of email and social media to contact me regarding other potential participants for the project, to suggest social meetings and to see how the research was going. I collected demographic information and asked participants to opt in to the research by signing a consent form (APPENDIX D) before the interview began. Ethical approval for this doctoral research was granted by the University of Sussex in 2014. Since then ethical guidelines have been continually updated. For example, my consent form did not have a cut off time for withdrawing from the project, whereas current guidelines suggest including one to protect the researcher. I also used a transcription service although the university now recommends audio transcription software, but this was not available to me at the time I was conducting my research.

All interviews were audio-recorded on a specific mobile phone (not a personal phone)

which was password protected. Files were uploaded to secure cloud storage following data storage and management guidance. Transcripts of interviews were anonymised and pseudonyms used. I transcribed all the interviews, apart from 8 which were done by a transcription company which has UK-based servers and works according to a strict privacy policy.

I have made further effort to ensure the couples' identities are protected by excluding any identifying information from the thesis or changing key information where necessary and within acceptable parameters. For example, I have changed specific jobs or area of employment and I have not provided detailed biographies of the couples. Where couples had highly distinctive biographies, or the presentation of their nationalities in combination alongside their city of residence was highly distinctive and so might be recognisable, I have chosen not to include them as 'voices' in the text because I could not ensure that I would be able to maintain their anonymity while simultaneously presenting their story with the level of detail that the methodology requires. I have presented an overview of the sample below as well as a table indicating the couples whose voices appear in the thesis and the cities they live in.

3.7 The Participants

The research participants are a diverse group in terms of age (20 - 74), nationality, linguistic background, socio-economic status, relationship status, and patterns of mobility. They are quite similar in educational status as most people in the study were graduates, including several who were currently studying for a postgraduate qualification. They were also mostly white. The high incidence of highly skilled people could mean that my recruitment procedures were too narrowly focused. However, I advertised widely on social media, and I made efforts to publicise the project to as broad a range of people as I could. In fact, I did very little selection in terms of who I publicised to: if a group was contactable by email, Twitter or Facebook, I followed up with a message. I did publicity in English, Spanish and French, as well as writing emails in these languages too. I put flyers on walls, in cafés, in bars, and in laundrettes across many areas of each city. I also used 'snowball' sampling, asking participants to put me in contact with others they knew.

The educational attainment of many of the migrants might be one reason why they

wanted to take part. They may have carried out interviews or fieldwork themselves and therefore be open to the idea of participating in such a project. Several of the participants made me aware of their interest in subjects such as sociology, and one participant, who was also doing a PhD, explicitly commented on how hard it is to find people to participate in research, which had been one of his motivations for asking his wife to take part. Despite these similarities, the group of participants represents a diverse range of experiences.

Exactly who could participate was quite clear. First, one or both partners needed to have migrated internationally to one of the cities I was interviewing in. The primary motivation for the migration had to have been their current relationship, which was the principal criterion I used to guide who counted as a love migrant. I excluded internal migration as well as host-national couples who had moved to the city; two Belgians who had moved to Brussels, for example. I would point out that love migration is not only applicable to international migrants; mobility for love which does not cross international borders can still uncover the significance of intimacy. I chose to focus on international migration because the stakes might be higher when considering an international move rather than an internal one. The significance of the migration is pronounced and therefore perhaps more accessible as a point to reflect on in the narratives. Therefore, I stipulated that there needed to be international migration in the context of the current relationship of any couple who could be included.

As the couples would initially self-select for the project, they also needed to identify in some way with the notion of love migration as defined in the recruitment materials. One or both partners needed to feel that their relationship involved migration for the relationship. I found that the couples seemed to understand the idea of a 'love migrant' and either readily identified with the concept themselves or adopted it enthusiastically for their partner in cases where only one had migrated. There was one instance when one of the participants did not identify with the idea of love migration. They were a married couple and the husband said that his wife had been a love migrant when she migrated to his country. However, she felt that he became a love migrant when they moved to Spain as she was not happy in his home country. She felt he had migrated for love but he disagreed feeling that his migration was for work. Their narrative provided an interesting perspective on differing views of migration within a couple. It also provided a counterpoint to the enthusiasm of the other couples. However, it did throw a sharp focus on how enthusiastic other couples had been about the label. Some of them were effusive about how 'finding' the label had helped them to understand what it was they were doing when they migrated to be with their partner.

Using these two criteria; international migration within the context of the current relationship; and identifying with the idea of being a love migrant, led to several pathways of

mobility for couples who could participate. One pathway is when only one partner has migrated internationally to one of the cities because of their relationship. One partner migrating often meant that the non-migrant partner was a host country national.

Another pathway is when both partners have migrated internationally from different countries because of their relationship. Often both partners are not citizens of the country of residence. However, both partners migrating could include a return migration, in other words a host-national who was moving back because of the relationship (although none of the couples interviewed in my research fit this description).

The pathways described above outline two quite neat ways of viewing the migration of the couples. It is important to note that these pathways are based on the mobility of the couple and not on nationality. Categorisation based on patterns of mobility, rather than nationality, reveals the richness and nuance of (re)location. Because of the complexity and richness of mobility, many of the couples straddled the pathways outlined above or fit into them but in a slightly modified way.

One couple who exemplify the complexity sometimes involved in love migration are Camilla and Rolf. They both moved to Barcelona as part of their universities' exchange programmes, which is how they met. Rolf moved back to his home country, but they continued their relationship at distance. Camilla was unsure about whether to move back home; she wanted to continue their relationship but felt that they could not carry on indefinitely with a long-distance relationship. Her decision was about whether to remain a migrant in Barcelona or to go home. Rolf did move back to Barcelona so their relationship could continue. Here they were both, initially, migrants to Barcelona. Later, Rolf migrated back to Barcelona specifically for their relationship and Camilla stayed. Camilla could be considered a non-migrant, or she could be considered a migrant. Her decision to remain a migrant was driven by her desire to continue her relationship with Rolf, so I considered them to be a love migration couple.

Whether or not couples fit neatly into one pathway or another is not the focus of the project. The pathways described above are to provide clarity on the various ways that couples could have become participants in this project. They are not meant to limit inclusion in the project or prescribe the concept of love migration. I also included couples who were established couples prior to their migration, and who migrated together. Some of these couples migrated through company transfer.

The pathways above reflect, broadly, the mobilities of the love migrant couples in this study. These categorisations cannot include the complexity of the mobility of each couple, but they are useful as a guide for me as researcher. The richness of love migrants' lives is,

hopefully, preserved through my choice of narrative interviewing and writing up their experiences.

3.8 Demographic Information

To give an overview of the sample, in this section I provide relevant demographic information about the participants as a group. I have presented information about the sample to protect the anonymity of some couples whose personal data, in combination, could identify them. The concern for participant anonymity was made very real to me when a television company contacted me wanting access to my participants. I have drawn on the narratives of all 47 couples, however I have not presented narrative extracts from all the couples with anonymity in mind. Information about participant couples whose narratives are presented in the main text is given in Appendix A.

3.8.1 Place

The research was carried out in Brussels, Barcelona and London between 2015 and 2016. The cities were chosen because as European capitals they would attract diverse groups of migrants. There were differences between the cities in terms of climate, cost of living, language and employment opportunities. It was hoped that these differences would provide access to a variety of migrants. At the time of the fieldwork, all the countries were all in the European Union so immigration for EU nationals was the same. The diversity of other nationalities means that immigration trajectories were varied and often quite distinct.

3.8.2 Number of Participants

I conducted a total of 56 interviews of which 9 were not used. I chose not to use some interviews because in 5 cases only one partner came for the interview, in 3 cases the

interviews were off topic and I withdrew 1 couple because of concerns about their anonymity. Therefore, my thesis is based on interview material from 47 couples (94 individuals comprised of 46 women and 48 men).

3.8.3 Gender and Sexuality

The 47 interviews in the final sample comprised 46 women and 48 men.

- 3 couples were in same-sex relationships (2 gay couples, 1 lesbian couple)
- 44 couples identified as heterosexual.
- No one identified themselves as trans or non-binary at the time of the interview.

3.8.4 Nationality and Ethnicity

In this section, I have grouped the participants in relation to the cities they were living in at the time of the interview. This allows us to see the number of couples with at least one partner living in their country or citizenships.

- London

There was a total of 11 interviews and 22 individuals.

- There were 6 British people, which meant over half of the London couples had one partner living in their country of citizenship (2 women, 4 men).
- There were 4 Chilean people (2 women, 2 men).
- There were 2 or fewer people with the following nationalities: Australian (2), Polish (2), American (1), Canadian (1), Czech (1), French (1), German (1), Russian (1), South Korean (1), Spanish (1) (7 women, 5 men).

- Brussels

There was a total of 20 couples and 40 individuals.

- There were 12 people who had Belgian or joint Belgian nationality which meant over half of the couples had one partner currently living in their country of citizenship (4 women, 8 men).
- There were 6 British people (3 women, 3 men).
- There were 5 Spanish people (3 women, 2 men).
- There were 5 American people (1 women, 4 men)
- There were 2 or fewer people with the following nationalities: Australian (2), Canadian (2), Chilean (1), Dutch (1), French (1), German (1), Italian (1), Polish (1), Portuguese (1), Romanian (1) (10 women, 2 men).

- Barcelona

There was a total of 16 couples and 32 individuals.

- There were 9 people with Spanish nationality, meaning over half the couples had one partner currently living in their country of citizenship (4 women, 5 men).
- There were 3 Brazilian people (2 women, 1 man).
- There were 2 or fewer people with the following nationalities: American (2), Australian (2), French (2), German (2), Irish (2), Belgian (1), British (1), Mexican (1), Puerto Rican (1), Ukrainian (1), French (Guadalupe) (1), Greek American (1), Swiss (1), Swedish (1), Dutch South African (1), (9 women, 11 men).

Most participants identified as white. Ethnicity has been described where relevant in the substantive chapters.

3.8.5 Education

They were overwhelmingly 'highly skilled' (e.g. Boucher, 2020), which is likely because the fieldwork sites were European capital cities which attract large numbers of skilled migrants.

- 8 people were educated to pre-university level (2 women, 6 men).
- 21 people held undergraduate qualifications (10 women, 11 men).
- 55 people graduate level qualifications (30 women, 25 men).

- 7 people were educated to post-graduate level (4 women, 3 men).
- 3 participants did not specify their educational attainment (3 men).

3.8.6 Relationship Status

I have grouped couples according to their relationship status at the time of the interview. This reflects the couples' intimate situation when I met them but is not necessarily indicative of their overall migration story.

- 21 couples were cohabiting and not married.
- 22 couples were married and cohabiting.
- 4 couples were living apart and not married

3.8.7 Children

Here I list the number of couples in relation to whether or not they had children together. I have also indicated the number of instances in which there were children from previous relationships. Children are grouped as pre-school- age, school-age and adult.

- 35 couples did not have children together.
- 4 couples had pre-school age children.
- 4 couples had school age children.
- 2 couples had adult children.
- 2 men had children from previous relationships.
- 1 couple were expecting a baby.

3.8.8 Age

The participants ranged in age from 20 to 74. The vast majority were therefore of working age.

- 13 people were 24 and under.
- 76 people were between 25 and 64.
- 5 people were over 65 and had retired.

3.9 Multi-sited Research

Between January 2015 and August 2016, I conducted fieldwork in Brussels, Barcelona, and London, where I interviewed couples who had migrated for love. I spent approximately three months in each city. The multi-sited approach was a way of diversifying the sample rather than to provide a direct comparison of place. The sites are all capital cities in Europe which provide urban, diverse and multi-cultural sites which certainly influence their experiences. These cities were also chosen because it was likely that there would be people from various countries who could speak English and because these cities overlapped with the languages I speak.

Multi-sited research has challenged the concept that political boundaries are a 'container of a particular set of social relations' (Falzon, 2009, p. 3). It has allowed researchers to see how people's lives traverse space and has constructed interesting dynamics between the 'local' and the 'global', allowing researchers to make associations across geographical space (Marcus, 1995). Multi-sited research has thus freed researchers from some conceptual boundaries. Yet, using more than one field site does not permit researchers to depict a 'totality' (Candea, 2007, p. 169). Nevertheless, multi-sited research has faced some criticisms; it could misleadingly imply holism in the research (Hage, 2005; Candea, 2007) and, secondly, researching across multiple sites is said to produce only superficial knowledge (Hage, 2005).

Insights gained from different sites can make them more site-specific, rather than holistic, as they can be understood within specific contexts. The research materials can be 'triangulated', as insights from the different cities can be juxtaposed. Rather than depict wholeness, then, comparing information from multiple sites is more likely to permit in-depth questioning of the materials, and avoid 'scaling up' (Lorimer, 2003, p.592) from the particular to the general.

We might also interrogate the assumption that staying in one place fosters in-depth knowledge as it is not only time which produces insight, but also space (Falzon, 2009, p.9). Place is particularly relevant if the object of study is mobile (Falzon, 2009, p.9). If the researcher is also mobile, then researcher mobility 'becomes a form of participant observation' (Falzon, 2009, p.9). The researcher's mobility becomes a form of 'participant observation', allowing the researcher to experience the world in a similar way to the people in the study (Falzon, 2009, p.9). Being a mobile researcher is pertinent to my thesis, as I was able to understand something of the participants' lives not only as spatially bounded, but also as transnational, and which take place beyond and between the boundaries of the city.

A final point is how to define multi-sited research. The three sites I chose are distinct in terms of language, climate and culture yet they are all part of a larger entity, which is Europe³. Falzon suggests that sites 'cannot be too close' (2009, p.13). However, spatial distance alone may not suffice to indicate a multi-sited study. Falzon argues that 'spatialized (cultural) difference' (2009, p.13) is also necessary. However, cultural difference can be found in proximity. In addition, difference can be understood in many ways. Thus, what the researcher defines as difference may not be recognised by the participants. As I will discuss later, many participants saw the similarities between these European cities as more important than their differences.

Place also matters in the way that it shapes relations between people (Massey, 1994; 2004) attachment and opportunity (Roseneil et al., 2020). As a British woman researcher at a British university, I acknowledge the dominance of English, anglophone literatures (Roseneil et al., 2020), traditions of thought and culture which have shaped this thesis. Drawing on Chakrabarty (2000/2008), Roseneil et al. point out that because our own histories are 'not always transparent to us', the concepts through which we work and think 'bear the burden of European thought and history' (Chakrabarty, 2000/2008, p. 4 in Roseneil et al., 2020, p. 16). The specific theories and ideas about love that I use in this thesis are particularly embedded in lineages of Euro-American ideas about love and couple relationships which incorporate normative understandings about gender and society. Taking inspiration from Roseneil et al., (2020), I aim to stay close to the specific stories participants tell, seeking always to depict the contextual specificities of their lives rather than attempting to make abstract or generalised statements about Western societies.

³ The UK was part of the European Union when the fieldwork was undertaken.

3.10 Language, Writing and Analysis

Language is not 'transparent' (Riessman, 1993, 2008), but a means for meaningful communication. Within the same language there are subtle differences of accent, vocabulary choice, intonation and so on, which can imply meaning as much as the words themselves. Language is also a marker of identity, and an instrument of power. Conducting interviews in the native language of the participant is often seen as best practice, because it is assumed to allow participants to fully express themselves, and to minimise power differences between researcher and researched. Furthermore, when interviewing people about their personal lives, it might be more difficult for them to speak about their experiences in a second or third language (Dewaele, 2008). Assuming dominance in one main language does not consider that people can be multi-lingual and feel equally comfortable in more than one language.

Reification of the notion of a mother tongue also neglects that speaking another language can permit the speaker 'freedom' to say things they might not otherwise say because of social conventions, the context in which the language was learnt, and so on (Norton, 2000). Because of the linguistic diversity of my participants, it was not possible to always conduct interviews in their own languages. Most interviews took place in English; however, where possible, I left the choice of language to the participants; I do not speak all the languages represented in the study, but could have conducted interviews competently in Spanish, and satisfactorily in French and Italian.

The interview with a Brazilian couple took place mostly in Spanish. Others went back and forth between Spanish and English, or French and English, and there was one interview which flowed between English, Spanish, French, and German; when I did not understand, I asked for clarification. Using English, then, was not always a choice I made, but often reflects the participants' wishes. One Brussels-based couple with whom I had only spoken in either French or Spanish before the interview greeted me in Spanish when they arrived at the cafe for the interview, then we all ordered in French, yet when I started the recording for the interview, they switched to English. They spoke during interview about their identity in Brussels as an international couple, which it seems they wanted to portray through language choice. By speaking English, they can position themselves as international, which is an identity that many participants seem to embrace. Participants' choices about language illustrate the ways that language choice is not just instrumental but is closely linked to identity.

Bearing in mind that many participants were speaking a second language, they were transcribed to reflect the participants' words. Overall, they were not corrected for accuracy,

though I did add words and leave out digressions if they made the quotes unduly difficult to understand. These alterations are indicated in square brackets. Although the main objective of the interviews was to understand the content, I did pay some attention to how participants spoke. Thus, I also preserved false starts, interjections and fillers, all of which may indicate something about the participant's view about the topic. When presenting the transcriptions in the text I have preserved the linguistic markers, as well as emphasis given by the participants, marked in italics. However, I have edited out false starts or fillers and marked them with '...' when clarity was needed. Inaudible sections are indicated with '[inaudible]' and abbreviations to a quote are indicated with '[...]'. When an academic transcription was used, they transcribed to my specification, following the conventions above.

I made a thematic analysis of transcripts using Nvivo and searching to identify and tag topics. This helped me to notice common threads across the narratives as well as examples which provided nuance. I also searched transcripts for words and themes and did multiple close readings of transcripts. When analysing the transcripts, I also listened to the audio file to allow the participants' voices, laughter and interjections to influence my interpretation of their words. The written word, while preserving content, lacked some of the feel of the interview. Listening to sections of the interviews again, helped me to understand more about how things were being said. I also used the photographs which I took in the interviews to jog my memory about the interactions between participants. In addition, I had notes which I made after the interviews. These helped me to remember small details about interactions, gestures and other non-linguistic information.

Conclusion

My aim in this chapter was to set out a methodological framework which would allow for greater engagement with love in mobile couples' lives. I argued that narrative interviewing would allow the participants to shape their story and provide space for them to negotiate meaning together. The construction of meaning in this framework also includes the researcher, as someone whose position can shift through the interview as both 'insider' and 'outsider'.

I argued that a combination of narrative interviewing and a material approach using objects would allow contemplation on non-verbal aspects therefore expanding the possibilities for what information the interview might provide. My position is that these are valuable

methods when investigating people's own understanding of their intimate lives. Narrative interviewing allows the conversation between participants (and researcher) to flow and meander, which apports a high degree of agency to the participants in how they construct their narrative. The objects allow space for reflection and contemplation, as well as bringing in a more consciously embodied element to the interviews. Using objects as part of the construction of a narrative, shifts the focus from a chronological re-telling to an experiential framework. The objects also draw attention to the nature of touch and related boundaries, highlighting how these objects often exceed their material form.

Focusing on feelings can produce messier, but rich, detailed narratives which recount emotional experiences. I chose to use photography to document the interviews which also allowed me to observe and reflect on the embodied nature of the interactions during the interviews after they had finished, allowing me to see again and anew gestures, touching and interactions which might have gone unnoticed during the interview.

In the following chapters, I present the empirical material produced by the methods outlined here. The narratives and analysis are presented to foreground participant voices and their own understandings of their love migration relationships.

Chapter 4. Understanding the Narration, Negotiation, and Geographies of Love Migration

Introduction

Couple love relationships involve closeness which can be emotional, social, embodied, sexual and geographical and can encompass combinations of these aspects in complex and constantly shifting ways (Jamieson, 2011). In this thesis, the concept 'love' is not intended to prescribe what love is or should be, nor to reproduce predetermined ideas about love. By using love as an analytical lens on migration, I aim to 'capture the quality of relationships and the processes that bind people together' (Jamieson, 2011, p. 1). As Jamieson has pointed out, intimacy and love are closely linked and these concepts and other related categories, such as family or friendship, can overlap and co-exist.

Couples negotiate their love relationships through multiple spatialities which are variously embodied, situated and gendered and include discourses and practices (Jamieson, 1998; Smart, 2007; Jamieson, 2011). In this first empirical chapter, I analyse the negotiations about their migration processes through attention to the 'quality of close connection' (Jamieson, 2011, p. 8) between them. I focus broadly on *why* love migrant couples migrate, *who* in the couple migrates, and *where* they choose to migrate to. I scrutinise the role which love plays in these decisions and their articulation, paying attention to emotional considerations to show how migration is shaped by the desire for couple intimacy.

In this first substantive evidence-based chapter, I show how physical copresence becomes a compelling aspect in love migrant couples' decisions to migrate. I also analyse how love migrants discursively construct migration as part of the commitment to their couple relationship which means that the act of migration acquires emotional meaning for love migrant couples. Migrating is positioned as an 'act of love' in the narratives and is constructed as an indication of whether partners love each other 'enough'. Migrating for love is also seen by some as part of a 'test' which love migrant couples may use to position their experiences and relationships as distinct from non-migratory relationships.

The chapter is organised into three sections. In the first section, I focus on narratives about couples' experiences of their relationship before they had decided to migrate. I analyse how the love migrants' desire and need for physical proximity and

incidental 'ordinary' physical contact influenced their decisions to migrate. I examine how love migrant couples negotiated their relationships before migration through technology. I argue that physical co-presence is central to emotional understanding for these couples because it not only facilitates understanding of how one partner feels toward the other, but because it also facilitates understanding of one's own feelings. I argue that love migrants construct love migration as meaningful and show that it is closely associated with commitment, thus making migration (or not) an indication of commitment to the relationship.

The second section addresses narratives about which partner would migrate. I scrutinise the ways that gendered inequalities are negotiated, challenged and reproduced through engagement with the emotional aspects of love migrant couples' lives. By showing how love is influential in shaping their migration trajectories, I expose how power circulates within love migrant couples' relationships. Through analysis of love and emotion, I address the subtle ways that agency and power are foregrounded or muted in the narratives which adds detail to our understanding of couple migration.

In the third section, I focus on narratives of place to analyse the role that place has in love migrant couples' decisions about where to migrate. I examine how countries and cities are imagined and constructed as (un)important facilitators of love migrants relationships and I relate these accounts to concurrent narratives which show that place has meaningful influence on love migrant lives.

4.1 'You have to be next to them': Physical Co-Presence in Pre-Migration Narratives

In this first section I present narratives which discuss the experiences of love migrant couples before they migrated and focus on how their relationships felt to them when they were living apart. Physical co-presence is important in the narratives, and I demonstrate that longing for physical intimacy is a compelling factor in love migration. My analysis draws attention to the desire for physical proximity in the narratives, which emphasises the embodied nature of love. I show that love migrant couples mostly desired everyday time together.

Juan and Katherine spent one year living apart. They communicated via email and instant message, but limited internet signal, and a significant time difference meant that they could not often communicate in real time, as Juan explained:

Juan: It's kind of separate world like another dimension of your life which is online, separate from your actual physical world and that you like collide with.

In Juan's narrative, we see how the spatial and temporal distance between him and Katherine create a sense of detachment between his 'physical world' and his life with Katherine. His use of the word 'collide' suggests that he desired unplanned, incidental togetherness, but this was prevented because of the geographical separation and the time difference. Obstacles to synchronous communication created a feeling of disconnection for Juan. The embodied nature of love makes geographical separation complicated for people in intimate couple relationships. Loved ones who live apart often long to be together. The need for physical co-presence in transnational relationships has been explored most frequently in relation to family and has multiple foci including how care is materialised across borders (Baldassar, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Coe, 2011; Hoang and Yeoh, 2012), how particular family roles and relationships are performed (Miyawaki and Hooyman, 2021; Kara and Wrede, 2022), finding time to communicate (Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding, 2006), and the gender implications for conducting relationships across borders (Salazar Parreñas, 2008; Vermot, 2015; Miyawaki and Hooyman, 2021).

Those critical of how technology has influenced intimate relationships have argued that intimate couple relationships have been undermined (Bauman, 2003; Illouz, 2007, 2012, 2020). Others have demonstrated that technology, such as dating apps, can have diverse and unexpected implications for relationships (Newerla and van Hooff, 2025) and that apps such as Tinder, known for sexual encounters, are often also used as a means for finding long-term relationships (van Hooff, 2020). Juan and Katherine had initially met on Tinder while Juan was on holiday, and their narrative highlights the complexities of spatio-temporal separation for intimate relationships in mobility. They said that sexual compatibility had been important in the development of their relationship, but their narrative also indicates that they desired other kinds of touch and contact. Juan talked about wanting to be able to communicate with Katherine at any moment during his day:

Juan: When I started like, beginning to feel something for her [...] like just for being sure, that I could write her if I wanted to, I took also my Spanish phone [...] with me to every place.

His comment emphasises his need for spontaneous contact at any moment during the day, which mimics, but does not replace the desire to 'collide' with one's partner. Research has shown that the use of technology in transnational caregiving relationships has contributed somewhat to democratising 'kin-work' because men are more actively involved (Baldassar, 2008, p.248). Juan is taking on emotional work by always having his phone with him, ready to make or receive calls. Gloria and Pietro also used text messages to connect as they could send quick messages to comment on small intimacies, as they said:

Gloria: We prefer to text, because to text, we text all day long, and we send pictures of stuff, and you don't really know what the other person is doing, but they can answer at any time.

Pietro: With the text, I can also tell I love you, but most of the things is that I can tell you what I'm doing, and this is cool because then we share the same thing.

The spontaneous nature of texting allowed them to maintain some synchronicities in their relationship without disrupting the rhythms of their lives. Another woman, Freya shared the same sentiment of preferring text as she said text is 'much better because it's direct'.

While synchronicity was one way of navigating the geographical separation, it did not fully overcome the desire love migrants had for physical co-presence.

Alfredo: I think that, apart from getting on well with someone, you have to touch them, you have to be next to them, you have to, you know? Give them a hug.

And Freya and Dominique commented:

Freya: because we live long distance as well it couldn't progress naturally.

Dominique: I think that the whole time of living apart is just treading water... It's just surviving.

Contemporary social narratives of love have proposed that intimacy is fostered through verbally disclosing feelings and thoughts (Giddens, 1992), as though these can exceed the body (Thien, 2005, p.192). These narratives point to the importance of focusing on sensuous experience and haptic knowledge to help us understand what it is to feel through the body. Touch and bodily practices are central to intimacy and attention to the 'visceral realm' (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2008, p.469) can help us to understand how people are moved to migrate.

Carey-Ann Morrison has pointed out that touch has often been explored through the institutions of heterosexuality or through non-normative forms of sex, but by focusing on everyday touch we can better understand how heterosexuality is reproduced through embodied practices (2010, pp.11-12). Morrison argues that the type of touching was less important than the ability to touch and be touched (2010, p.13) and was particularly significant for couples who had spent time apart. Being able to touch and be physically close was also central to the love migrants in my research, as the above narratives demonstrate. The couples in Morrison's research talked about the importance for everyday touch as a way of expressing love. Morrison argues everyday touch is often overlooked in academic research but should be given more attention because small acts of touching are an important way that couples demonstrate love for each other. Being unable to engage in everyday touch was a frustration for love migrant couples and lack of everyday physical contact was one aspect which compelled them to consider migrating.

While physical proximity was generally desired in love migrant relationships, a notable exception comes from Camilla and Rolf who found using video calls beneficial at the very start of their relationship precisely because it focused them on verbal communication:

Camilla: I thought it was really wonderful for the beginning of our relationship to be honest.

Rolf: I think you get to know each other in a different way.

Camilla: Absolutely. And we had to be creative and, um, it was I think it was wonderful [...] In the very early stages of our relationship we shared some very vulnerable things with each other which again, we were not physically in the same place, and we were sharing these things and it really helped both of us feel like we could trust the other.

For Camilla and Rolf, being limited to phone and video calling focused them on talking and disclosing to get to know each other. Technology has been shown to facilitate 'higher levels of disclosure or hyperpersonal communication' (Valentine, 2006, p.367) and brings to mind disclosing intimacy as central to contemporary relationships (e.g. Giddens, 1992). However, verbal communication and seeing each other on screen was not usually sufficient interaction for love migrant couples over extended periods of time because while video calling 'conveys

something of the materiality of bodies' (Longhurst 2013, p.665), couples expressed the need for a more complete physical presence. The next two extracts are two people from different couples whose comments show the need for physical proximity and a fully sensory experience involving touch and smell:

Aoife: How do you know that you love someone when you're doing it through Skype? 'cuz you can't smell their skin and when they come home from work on a bad day you don't see them, you're not part of it.

Gabriel: On my behalf, [...], it was more I really like this girl, I really like the connection we have, and I would like to see more of this, but I felt like at a distance like... [...] I couldn't go past a certain point of affection without being more physically close [...] I didn't really feel like I really loved her until [...] I was actually here.

The embodied nature of love is palpable in these comments. Both extracts show that understanding the feeling of love involved physical presence and corporeal experiences. Fully understanding their own emotions and knowing whether they loved their partner involved physical proximity and a sensuous experience in everyday interactions. The above narratives demonstrate that migration was compelled by the participants' desire for physical proximity not only for the visceral, embodied experiences it would bring, but also because it allowed them to better understand their own feelings.

4.2 Uses of Technology in Love Migrant Relationships

Love migrant couples' uses of technology included doing things together in real time over video call which created a 'virtual co-presence' (Baldassar, 2008, p.252). Literature on the ways that technology facilitates intimacy in migration has focused on family intimacy, such as between parents and children (Baldassar, 2007a, 2007b; Longhurst, 2013; Salazar Parreñas, 2014; Acedera and Yeoh, 2019) or sexual intimacy (e.g. Valentine, 2006). Camilla and Rolf, who we heard from earlier and who had initially relished the extended talking which being physically apart prompted, later engaged in activities together, in real time, over the video call. Camilla recalled that they had dates over their video calls:

Camilla: One of my favourite dates was when he decided that, he looked up a salmon recipe and he sent it to me, and then I looked up an Indie film and so he was in charge of the recipe and I was in charge of the film and we went and bought the ingredients separately and then we cooked our meals separately and then we sat down to have dinner in front of the computer, watching the indie film with the exact same meal.

Cooking the food and eating together allowed them to have a similar sensory experience. Each partner had invested time and effort into thinking through what to eat and what to watch. As Camilla said, he was 'in charge' of the food and she of what to watch. Splitting the tasks represents a division of the relationship work and effort invested into the relationship. Dinner dates are part of the romantic canon of activities and a recognisable form of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) which both partners engage with. Preparing the food is a multi-sensory practice which draws on visceral experiences allowing them to understand more about their own emotions. They commented that they would often watch television 'together' over Skype and frequently Rolf would fall asleep while they were watching. They explained:

Rolf: One of us had to turn off the sound.

Camilla: You can tell he's the technical one, right? [all laugh] but it was, things like that we're really, really nice and magical.

Rolf: Well, having the same thing makes you feel like the other person is more uh...

Camilla: Like you're there as close as you can be.

Rolf: ...what is the word for it? More present.

Camilla: Yes, more present. Perfect.

Rolf: That's important.

These activities extended their use of video calls beyond 'visual telephony' (Miller and Sinanan, 2014), where the communication is largely verbal but with a visual element. Doing activities together synchronised their time and helped them feel closer. Eating the same food and watching the same film allowed them to be more 'present' in one another's lives while they were apart. Another way they used technology was through extended calls; Camilla said:

Camilla: We started having Skype calls and our first Skype call was seven hours. It was insane, and I say [...] “as if like that was long!” The first one was seven hours, the second one was six hours, the third one was like eight hours. I don’t even know [...] what we talked about [...] They were so crazy epic long because we just like carried on about our lives with Skype on and I was working from home so we could do everything and just leave the computer on – “I’m gonna go make tea”, come back “Oh, I’m gonna go make a tea too.” I mean, just you could live with that person through [...] I mean, we just lived with Skype on really.

Their use of video calling for extended periods of time and which culminates in one or both partners falling asleep blurs the boundaries with what has been called ‘always on’ communication (Neustaedter et al., 2015). ‘Always on’ refers to a video connection which is left open for a long period of time, often becoming a background presence rather than a focused phone call. It has been used in work environments to assist colleague communication (Mantei et al., 1991; Bly et al., 1997), as a means for transnational families to stay in touch (Oduor and Neustaedter, 2014) and has been documented as common practice by couples who live apart (Saadatian et al., 2014, Miller and Sinanan 2014; Gooch and Watts 2015; Neustaedter et al., 2015). Among family and for people in couple relationships, always-on communication is said to support emotional connections between participants (Longhurst, 2013; King-O’Riain, 2015).

Most participants in this thesis used recent technologies such as texts and video calling, described in this section. One love migrant couple had a different experience: Moira and Piotr met in Munich in 1972 when the city was preparing for the Olympics and had used phone calls and letters to communicate. She later migrated to Belgium for their relationship. She described their communication:

Moira: My own family then were very surprised when I started getting phone calls every Saturday morning and five letters a week [...] five letters a week. They all arrived on Tuesday and Thursday.

The letters and regular phone calls revealed the relationship she was having with Piotr to her family. Their communication was technologically distinct, but it reminds us that technology is historically contingent. A further extract gives some context to their relationship:

Moira: It was 1972, Munich in 1972 and every square in the city had been scrubbed. The place was immaculate and there was a vibe. So we were in this international group. There were people from South America, from Turkey, from Albania, which was very unusual at the time. Across the Iron Curtain. Italians, Swiss, French, North American, whatever. It was a wonderful ... that was my first opportunity to be in a kind of a totally international setting.

This also serves as a reminder that the international context in which most couples in this study found themselves is historically continuous and their story provides evidence that migration for love is not inherently a new phenomenon.

4.2.1 Technological Ruptures

Video connections can facilitate emotional closeness (Longhurst, 2013; Clarke-Salt, 2017b), and seeing loved ones on the screen can foster deeper emotional connections. But the capacity of technology to make the boundaries of space more fluid and make people feel geographically closer should not be overestimated. Being able to communicate with their partner was valuable to love migrants, but it also obliged them to sit in front of the screen and talk which became monotonous and emotionally overwhelming. Having to find things to talk about also led to frustration by increasing their awareness that they were not physically present in each other's day-to-day experiences. Video calling, then, can make couples ever more aware of the distance which separates them. Another couple, Gloria and Pietro, found a way to mitigate the pressures of video calling:

Pietro: Most of the time we don't put the camera [on] actually. The problem is that seeing her face without touching her... then I prefer voice, her voice you know make me other feelings that I prefer, I don't know, it's soft and I can imagine her close to me when with the screen no, I know that she's not close to me, you know they are different.

Gloria: You feel more the distance.

Pietro: If I put my headphones and I'm on my bed I can touch my butt and imagine that it's her touching my butt, you know? [...] I prefer to go there and having these sensation than having the Skype.

Their comments suggest that the visual element can become too intense. Turning the camera off created a space for a more emotionally and viscerally intense exchange. Not using the visual channel also facilitated intimate uses of technology.

Research has shown that touch can be taken-for-granted in relationships as is it so central to everyday routines and practices. Morrison's research on the domestic practices of heterosexual couples demonstrated that being close to one's partner was important to her participants. It was the 'mundane' and 'everyday' touch which Morrison found sustained relationships (2012, p.13), but physical affection was important for demonstrating love for one another. However, the kinds of touch which were important and preferred were not the kinds of touch of 'idealised romance' but the everyday touching. These small acts of touch became part of domestic routines which was central to how her participant couples created a shared subjectivity (ibid.). Morrison's research was not with migrant couples, but she noted that for couples who had lived apart for a sustained period, it was ordinary mundane touch which they missed. My participants' narratives seem to concur with the idea that incidental touch is important to the relationship.

Some love migrant couples explained how they tried to use technology to negotiate the absence of mundane, everyday touch. Gloria and Pietro liked to use text messages to connect as they could send quick messages to comment on small intimacies. They said,

Gloria: I think, for example, we prefer to text, because to text, we text all day long, and we send pictures of stuff, and you don't really know what the other person is doing, but they can answer at any time. Skyping, it's more like setting a time.

Pietro: And the problem with Skype, that we don't have with text, is that text, we can have a social life, when Skype, you cannot really [...] for example, in Paris, I regretted that I couldn't be with my friend, when I spend, I don't know two hours [on Skype]. When the text, I can also tell I love you, but most of the things is that I can tell you what I'm doing, and this is cool because then we share the same.

Another couple, Carlos and Faye shared similar sentiments:

Carlos: Almost every day we Skype or by Facebook. We spend a lot of time in front of the computer.

Faye: I had some times like “OK, I’m going to Skype this evening” and [...] people as me “Do you want to [...] go out?” “No, no because I have to talk to my boyfriend” [...] and you really feel like [...] really depending on each other and that you maybe lose other things because of the Skype all the time.

These comments point to the potentially isolating nature that the work involved in relationships at distance sometimes require. Technology facilitates communication over distance which has also created the expectation of communication. Being able to make a video call can provide space for couples to connect but the above narratives provide examples of how technology ruptures ordinary temporal rhythms (Acedera and Yeoh, 2019). While it provides connection with the romantic partner, video calling can limit opportunities to interact with friends, family and colleagues who are close by.

The emphasis on sharing ordinary, mundane experiences of everyday life resonates with literature about intimacy developing through everyday practices in shared space (Jamieson, 1998; Gabb and Fink, 2015). Love migrant couples talked about sharing what they were eating, or what their bus journey was like. These small details were shared via text in the moment they were happening, thus the partner could get an impression of what their day was like. They lamented having to save up their experiences over the day and then talk about them on video calls because it felt disconnected from their lives in real time. Couples preferred to capture and hear about what each other was doing in real time. The importance of synchronicity is brought out in Camilla and Rolf’s narrative with the emphasis on wanting to share in the moment and not rupture the rhythms of daily life. Synchronous contact seemed to make them feel closer as their lives, although geographically separate, were unfolding in the same temporalities. Pietro commented that having to set time aside to have a video call also intruded on him being able to carry on with his life in his immediate surroundings. Another couple shared a similar view,

Dominique: Skype is great but it's not... And also, when the internet connection breaks [...] I had a really shit internet connection in my other flat

Freya: Extremely! [laughs]

Dominique: And you're like "What now?" You were like you're on edge, you're knackered, you're stressed, you just want to have a quiet ten-minute chat and then the fucking internet just breaks for a few seconds and like, well, that's it, I give up. Thank you, not tonight. Oh, it's horrible, and you feel the other one longing for a connection on the other end but then the thing in the middle is just not cooperating.

Freya and Dominique's narrative shows the frustration created when the desire for a moment to chat is thwarted by the lack of a reliable internet connection. Technology can disrupt physical boundaries and become invisible (Haraway, 1991) when it works, but when it goes wrong, as my participants' comments suggest, it makes itself known and emphasises their separation rather than 'de-materializing' distance (Urry, 2007, pp.5-6). The use of technology here *emphasises* boundaries, highlights their own corporeal physicality and underlines their geographical separation. Not only do these participants feel geographically distant from one another, they also feel disconnected from their immediate surroundings. Disconnection created the feeling for many love migrants that, as Jesús put it, 'you are putting your life on hold'.

4.2.1 Counting Down: Temporalities of Love Migration

These narratives speak to the importance of temporalities and synchronicities in our love lives. Time is central to embodied emplacement as it is integral to our understanding of space and place. The places we live in are made dynamic because of time and because 'space and time are inextricably interwoven' (Massey, 1994, pp.260–1): it has been argued that time is part of what makes us human (Adam, 2006). Thien's (2005) understanding of proximity and distance is useful because it blurs the boundaries between the two, seeing closeness in distance and vice versa. Viewing intimacy as a spatiotemporal practice can help us understand the practices involved in the intimate lives of love migrants. For example, distance affected the temporal experience of being in a relationship; it limited spontaneity; it put pressure on time together to be extra special; it made partners feel that their life was 'on hold'; it created an end point which led to feelings of dread. As Dominique and Freya put it:

Freya: You couldn't be like "oh, I'll just catch you after work for a drink." It had to be like "I am visiting your house. I'm taking a flight to see you for a weekend." [...] whenever we spoke it was like compartmentalised time where you'd be like "here is the time that I speak to Dominique, I can't do anything else" [...] And then it's just not like now, you know, you make the dinner and it's just natural.

Dominique: Yeah, normal life.

Dominique describes their lives as having compartmentalised time which prevents his relationship with Freya from merging with other aspects of his life. They capture the lack of spontaneity and their need to interact with each other in the mundane reality of everyday life. Gabb and Fink (2015) have commented that, for couples who live together, time apart can be a way of asserting agency as it provides a chance to spend time on their own individual interests and spend time with friends. They also observe that coming home after spending time apart is cherished. But living away from one's partner means a lack of daily interactions. Dominique and Freya expressed that they felt they were missing out on spending 'normal' time together:

Dominique: Normal life [...] Like doing things, you know, meeting for a drink after work [...] Stuff you can't do when you're, when you meet for a weekend you're planning weeks in advance, like 'shit, what am I going to do?' Er, let's go there.

Freya: Yeah, everything's got to be the best, hasn't it? Because it's special time.

Dominique: Special time. You only have those few hours. It's basically Friday night, 11 o'clock to Sunday afternoon.

Being together after separation is cherished, but by celebrating and making their time together 'special', they limit the incidental interactions, routines and repetitions of daily life; all their together time becomes 'special', which creates pressure. Agnes had similar views about her relationship:

Agnes: Even when you are together it's not the same as when you're together all the time because you know you have three days and so you are a bit pressured to do things or see things but sometimes, I want to just spend time together.

In the remarks above, participants talk about the difference between time spent 'doing' things and time spent 'just together'. When they only had a short time together, couples felt pressured to make it special. Spending 'normal' time together, which can be understood as 'down' time, unplanned time, or time doing mundane things resonates with Gabb and Fink's (2015) study in which they stressed the importance of mundane activities in relationships. If the couple only have a weekend together, they may want to try and make it special by, for example, going out to eat. Marking the time as a special occasion can signify the importance of one's partner. One partner may be paying for the dinner, which distinguishes it as a type of gift. According to Gabb and Fink's study, though, mundane activities are not related to money. Freya and Dominique's narrative points to Cwerner's observation that migration is as much phenomenon of time as it is of space (2001, p.7), although Cwerner's analysis centres more on the social and cultural implications of time in migration than on intimate relationships. His analysis does remind us that time is also culturally specific and therefore notions of what indicates 'special' time and the pressures associated with it are always already determined by social contexts. Therefore, what 'spending time together' as a couple means and how much time is expected and appropriate as well as being culturally specific, could differ across generation (Langhamer, 2013, 2015), social class (Rubin, 1976), gender and the life course (Bildtgård and Öberg, 2017).

According to Gabb and Fink, what makes these activities important to long-term relationship maintenance is that they show 'intimate couple knowledge' (2015, p. 21). Of all the activities listed by participants in their study which were important 'it was mundanities which appeared to be most highly prized' (p. 21). These activities cannot be experienced without 'wasted time' or 'down time', as Gabb and Fink refer to it. Mundane activities demonstrate a commitment to making the relationship work, and the personal time which is invested in them is a way of affirming that. Carol Smart also argues that 'things which may not seem special to an outsider but are important to the couple' (2007, p.68) are important in professing love for one another.

Dominique and Freya described their emotions when the Sunday of the weekend visit arrived:

Dominique: Most of all the feeling - we haven't talked about that – the Sunday dread feeling [...] The only day you have is Saturday. Saturday everything is great. Saturday night everything is great. You get up Sunday morning and...

Freya: It's a bit of a countdown.

Dominique: Countdown. Yeah, like “If we’re going to town, I better get my bag as well because we won’t have time to come back home and then I have to go to the train station.” So, you carry your bag and you’re like I’m travelling today, then you’re knackered.

Freya: Yeah, and the whole day is a bit sour.

Our sense of time as embodied and emotional is demonstrable in the above comment. The liminalities and temporariness of their experiences restrict the space and time available for intimacy. Dominique’s comment about carrying his bag around for the whole day, while describing a practical concern, also aptly captures the way time seemed like a heavy burden for them, showing how our experiences of time are embodied. Lack of time to ‘waste’ created an acute sense of time ticking away. Acedera and Yeoh’s (2019) analysis of transnational couples has shown that the temporal as well as spatial dynamics are reconfigured and reimagined through migration. They focus on migrant wives to Singapore and ‘left behind’ husbands in the Philippines. They discuss how technology could empower couples but that video calls were not their preferred way to communicate as it did not allow them to simultaneously engage in other activities. Feeling that they were doing things simultaneously allowed them to feel closer. In my study, emotional closeness was also apparent with ‘simultaneity’ rather than ‘meanwhileness’ (Cwerner, 2001, p.24) being an important mode of emotional connection for the couples. Achieving a sense of rhythm and synchronicity in their relationships creates ‘a sense of control over their own lives despite temporal and spatial distance’ (Acedera and Yeoh, 2019, p.267). Disruptions in these rhythms can fracture intimacies by undermining imagined futures whereas successful synchronicity cultivates ‘imaginar[ies] of nearness’ (Acedera and Yeoh, 2019, p.264) which foster the development of the relationship.

In sum, using technology to create a sense of temporal closeness allows love migrant couples to better negotiate their time apart. Notwithstanding, technology has limits to what can be communicated and the longing for corporeal and temporal togetherness was instrumental in compelling love migrant couples to migrate. My analysis of love through an embodied perspective has shown that love migrants understand and feel love in a bodily way. The desire for co-presence as a way of getting to know their partner is an important influence on their migration.

4.3 The Making of Meaning Through Migration

Benson and O'Reilly (2009, 2016) argue that the lives of lifestyle migrants acquire additional meaning through migration. I argue that love migrants similarly gain meaning in their lives through migration. Addressing the question of what viewing migration in terms of love reveals, I analyse how migration is narrated as a meaningful act of love.

The first couple in this section, Joanna and Bernard, had met while on a university exchange programme and later, Joanna had moved to Brussels. In their narrative, migration was positioned as being indicative of 'real' love when they were talking about a love migration relationship between their friends:

Bernard: One of my good friends, his sister is dating a Canadian, and he came here (to Brussels). He didn't really like it, so he said, "Well, yeah, I'm going back", and it just showed that she's not the most important thing to him.

Joanna: Do you think that means they didn't love each other enough?

Bernard: Yes, I think in the end, yes, [...] If you love each other, really, you go, that's it. Of course, it's hard and whatever, but you do it.

By connecting migration with emotional intensity, they distinguish love migration relationships as special. Social stratification and distinction based on cultural capital and social class is a documented aspect of migration (Bacqué et al., 2015; Sampaio and King, 2019). The love migrant identity involves a further aspect of distinction, namely the performance of deep emotional connection and intensity. Love migrant relationships are viewed, by love migrants themselves, as emotionally stronger than non-migrant relationships, which is demonstrated in the following extract:

Joanna: That's one of the things, maybe, I think other couples [couples who have not migrated for their relationship] don't have to test their relationship in that way, just because the circumstances never come. I wonder if a lot of people I know, would they be willing to do it?

Bernard: I think you get stronger relationships [...] I would say that it's really hard. Like, you can't expect it to be beautiful [...] every day. You have to be prepared to make some... give up some things and make some concessions and compromise.

Yvonne: Well, is that different from any relationship?

Bernard: Well, yes, because I mean [...] It's just, you don't face the same choice, like you don't face the same ... You don't have to give up that much for that person, if you're here or you both have jobs.

Joanna's and Bernard's understanding of their own relationship is comparative. They narrate the sacrifices and the compromises they face as a form of social capital, or 'romantic capital' (Regan, 2021), which allows them to assert a superior depth of love in their own relationship. Existing definitions of romantic capital consider employment and higher education as well as shared values and desired physical and personality traits (Regan, 2021), characteristics which are observable prior to a relationship. The kind of romantic capital articulated in Joanna and Bernard's narrative reflects a shared system of values related to the enactment of love (Regan, 2021) but which only becomes apparent through migration. Being in a love migrant relationship connotes passion and 'really' loving each other. These connotations become attached to the people in the relationships, meaning they are not just in passionate relationships, but are passionate people. Love migrants' romantic capital is created both by being prepared to migrate for someone but also having someone prepared to migrate for you. The latter demonstrates that a person is desired and loved. Love migrants' romantic capital might dissipate or diminish in some ways should the relationship end. However, like Illouz's (1998) participants who had memories of great love, love migrants' can choose to continue to draw on their experiences of love migration in the future. Thus, love migrants have a migration-specific capital which they acquire through the act of migration.

Joanna described finding living in Brussels difficult at times. She talked about how she found some comfort from Bernard:

Joanna: I think the choices we made, made it clear to the other that we would do, no matter what, for each other. When I was having really hard times here, I remember, when I wanted to leave, it was, he at one point said to me, if that's what you need, if that's what would make you happy, we're going to leave. I'll drop everything, quit my job, leave my family, go wherever you need to go. And

just him saying that was, like, okay, I know he would do that for me, so I'm fine.

Joanna found reassurance in Bernard saying he would migrate if it was what she needed. Her narrative also shows Joanna's migration impacted her wellbeing. Others have noted the detrimental effects that accompanying a spouse in migration can have (Walsh, 2008) because migration can amplify differences which were smaller prior to migration (Coles and Fechter, 2008, p.8).

Joanna said they did not argue about 'relationship things' but there were points of tension relating to migration. They explained:

Joanna: He obviously has a million friends here, and so it's normal that he has more things to do than I do, and it was really hard to find this balance [...] because at the same time, he had to give up a lot for me, because his friends would say, if he wanted to, he could go out with them every night, just the guys, whatever, but he couldn't just leave me at home every night by myself. So, we would try and really find things for me to do so he wouldn't have to feel bad going out. There were times when he still would, and I would be alone, and then I would get mad at him for that, and ... It was those kinds of things.

Bernard: Even though you didn't want to.

Joanna: Yes, I would be like, I would make him go, and then he would come back and I'd be mad that he went. It was like, I didn't want to be that girlfriend that stopped him.

Bernard: And if I stayed, she was also mad that I didn't go, so it was a lose-lose situation. [...] that was actually the hardest thing for me, for a year or something.

Their narrative shows their struggles in this situation. Joanna migrated to Bernard's home country because she and Bernard both looked for jobs simultaneously and he found one first. Analysing the influence gender had on their relationship shows that gender advantages present in the labour market facilitated Bernard finding a job first. Difficulties adjusting are commonly documented in the experiences of partners who migrate to accompany their partner, often for work (Fechter and Coles, 2008). But using gender to frame Joanna's experience does not fully

explain how Joanna's migration shifted from an act of love and excitement to a situation which caused resentment and later became more joyful again when they decided to migrate to Canada. Joanna's dissatisfaction does not arise from being put in a particular gender role.

Focusing on the emotional aspects shows how Joanna's dissatisfaction built slowly overtime. Her frustration grows as she develops these feelings because she feels she is becoming someone she doesn't want to be, saying 'I didn't want to be that girlfriend that stopped him'. The accumulation of small entanglements of power, such as choosing to spend time with friends, or not, might 'feel ordinary and thus remain undifferentiated, or because their singular effects are so minimal, that their accumulation can be noticed only in retrospect' (Kolehmainen and Juvonen, 2018, p.6).

Drawing on Dallos and Dallos (1997), van Hooff argues that 'in an egalitarian relationship, both partners should be able to influence each other to the same extent, with neither partner having overall dominance' (2013, p. 39). Migrating to Belgium became problematic for Joanna and for Bernard who felt he was in a 'lose-lose' situation, and it seemed that Bernard had all the influence and this gave rise to Joanna's dissatisfaction. When they 'equalised' their situation somewhat by migrating to Joanna's home country, this imbalance shifted, so their narrative shows how power ebbs and flows within relationships. Highlighting this circulation of power suggests that 'successful' relationships might include times when there are imbalances but that how these issues are resolved (or not) is, overall, more significant.

Focusing on Joanna and Bernard's emotional interactions allows us to see 'the under-the-radar entanglements of power relations that are essential in shaping the everyday fabrics and textures of intimate relationships' (Kolehmainen and Juvonen, 2018, p.5). Focusing on emotional entanglements even when they are not especially pronounced shows that they are important, even if they can only be recognised in hindsight and shows that everyday interactions should not be taken-for-granted or 'unthought' (Kolehmainen and Juvonen, 2018, p.7).

Migration was positioned as meaningful in other love migrant couples' narratives. Gabriel and Agnes associated their migration with commitment:

Gabriel: It's [migrating] definitely made the whole thing more serious and again as I said we don't conceive our relationship [...] without someone moving to be [...] in the other person's city.

Agnes: For me also it was a commitment like at the beginning when we were discussing

[...] how do we reduce the distance and he said [...] you have a job that [you] like and I don't like my job so much [...] and [...] it's more difficult for you to find a city so just find a job and then I'll try to follow and for me that was a commitment also.

Although she cautions that 'commitment is a nebulous term whose meaning differs according to context' (2013, p. 37), van Hooff's research on heterosexual couple relationships in the UK allows us to understand commitment as a 'mutually agreed upon' (2013, p. 39) concept which overlaps with power. As Gabriel said, the migration indicated that they were committed to, or 'serious' about the relationship. Similarly, in the following extract, migrating is related to commitment to the relationship and not wanting to migrate shows a lack of such commitment. Aoife and Alfredo explained why they temporarily split up:

Aoife: Alfredo didn't wanna leave Spain, I didn't want to leave Australia, so we called it a day, right?

Alfredo: Yeah yeah, like we were finished.

As neither Aoife nor Alfredo wanted to migrate, they ended the relationship. They stayed in touch and Aoife later migrated for their relationship. The complexities of the meanings that emerge from migrating (or not) for the relationship are brought out in further dialogue between Gabriel and Agnes. While Gabriel talks about migrating solidifying the relationships, he distances himself somewhat from expectations about the relationship and commitment by 'following' Agnes rather than expecting her to follow him or even negotiating together. To some extent he distances himself from the 'ownership' of the migration (M. Rubin, 2013). He said:

Gabriel: There was one thing for me that I thought it was very important and it's that we didn't know how this was going to turn out, I didn't want her to sacrifice anything so that's why I told her "You choose your job [...] without taking me into account and I will see." Because at that time [...] I knew that my plan would involve just being free to go wherever I wanted, and it would have less impact on my life in general or in my career because for me it's just somewhere to move.

Gabriel acknowledges that it is easier for him to find work and organises his own employment around Agnes' which shows an astute understanding of the gendered differences which could

affect them in the labour market.

The practical emphasis which Gabriel gives his migration can be read as entangled with complex relationships of power. As van Hooff has pointed out, 'commitment is closely linked to power and control within relationships' (2013, p.39). Gabriel's desire for Agnes not to make sacrifices because of their relationship, while seemingly altruistic, does also enable him to remain somewhat 'free', meaning his migration has, as he said, 'less impact on [his] life in general'. Further, he attempts to mitigate the ways that his migration might be seen as commitment or strength of feeling, by saying it is 'just somewhere to move' and insisting that Agnes does not take him into account when looking for a job. Furthermore, he says:

Gabriel: If it goes wrong, it's not going to go horribly wrong. My life is not going to be ruined. So, the worst thing that can happen is that I have broken heart — let's hope not — and that I have to move back or just move to another place.

His attempts to downplay the strength of his commitment might be read, as Illouz would put it, as 'reluctance to give up the freedom to choose' (1998, p.178). However, van Hooff's research on couples in the UK showed that for younger couples, commitment can be seen as a series of stages through a couple relationship and was closely connected to cohabiting (2013, p. 37). Migration, then, could be seen as a stage in mobile couple relationships which suggests increasing commitment. Coupled with his decision to migrate, Gabriel's tongue-in-cheek comment about having a broken heart, I believe, hint at the strength of feeling he has for Agnes. Aoife and Alfredo's relationship did not initially 'progress' because neither wanted to migrate. In Agnes and Gabriel's narrative, Agnes associated his migration, and their subsequent cohabitation, with commitment even though Gabriel attempts to hedge this interpretation somewhat. And, for van Hooff's participants, cohabitation was simultaneously viewed as 'major step for the couples, in most of the accounts it was entered into without a great deal of reflection or discussion' (2013, p. 47), but it is possible that the distances involved in love migrant relationships caused decisions about migrating (or not) to have greater weight.

Another perspective on how migration becomes meaningful is offered through a reading of Carol Smart's (2007) perspective on commitment. She has argued that it can be difficult to say one is committed to a relationship when it is in its early stages. However, she delineates different forms of commitment that can relate to stages of relationships. One kind of commitment which she identifies as a 'promise for the future' (2007, p.68) becomes 'deeply symbolic, an endorsement that looks ahead to a new life in partnership' (ibid.). She also discusses commitment in relation to later stages of couple relationships when a ceremony

might be used to indicate and affirm a shared past or to shore up a couple relationship which has become 'fragile' (ibid.). Love migrants at early stages of their relationships seem to attach a similar kind of symbolic meaning and promise to their migration, using it to indicate they want a life together when they migrate and sometimes breaking up if they do not. Love migrants do not engage in formal ceremonies as Smart's participants did, instead they choose to pack their belongings and board a plane. The journey to the new destination for love migrants is meaningful and takes on a similar ceremonial connotation. Gabriel's hedging around how his migration can be interpreted could suggest a desire to distance it from connotations of commitment. This could be interpreted as him withholding commitment, to some extent, and in this way could be seen as a source of power (van Hooff, 2013, p. 43). Certainly in van Hooff's research, participants tended to assume that women wanted long-term relationships, leaving decisions about commitment to male partners. As she points out, this creates a dynamic of power in which the woman is 'in a position of weakness' (2013, p. 43). Notwithstanding, Gabriel does migrate to be with Agnes which along with his self-conscious joking about risking a broken heart also indicate that he felt intense emotions which he was unsure were reciprocated, a situation resolved for him, as he pointed out, only by moving closer to each other.

This section has shown that migrating for love is discursively constructed as commitment and a sign of 'true' love in love migrant narratives. Thus, migrating for love is part of how love is performed. Just as in some migrations where material goods come to signify love (Coe, 2011), the act of migrating itself has the potential to be a signifier of love. Further, migrating for love is marked out as distinct from non-migratory relationships and is narrated as demonstrating a deeper emotional connection because of the obstacles and sacrifice it presents. Love migration can come to indicate 'real' love and is, therefore, a compelling reason to migrate, 'conquering' (King, 2002) reasons not to. The migration itself (or refusal to migrate) becomes the highest indication of love (or lack thereof) and migration emerges as a necessary process in how love is performed.

4.4 The Negotiation of Who Would Migrate

In this section I develop the discussion to analyse the ways that love migrant couples decided who would migrate. It is of note that many of the couples in my study were not married but still articulated their migration in terms of their couple relationship. One aspect where being

unmarried is salient is in the decision-making processes about who would migrate because there is no legal dependency in the relationship.

When Joanna and Bernard decided that they wanted to live together, they agreed to base their decision about who would migrate around work. Bernard explained,

Bernard: We said, okay, let's just both look in our own countries, and the first one who finds a job takes it, and the other one comes. So, we did. I found a job, and she came here.

Similarly, Beatriz and Jesús used the idea that they both look for jobs as an important factor in who would migrate and to where:

Jesús: We said OK, we want to be together, [...] we decided okay we look for a job and whoever finds the first job in whichever city, we go there. So, I found a job in Bratislava [...] she also started looking for jobs in Bratislava and she found one like really quick.

Love migrant couples sought an egalitarian way of deciding who would migrate and often attempted to make the decision arbitrary rather than it being 'led' by one partner. And because they were not primarily migrating because of their careers, but to facilitate their relationships, neither partner's job necessarily took priority. And, as unmarried couples, there was no legal framework for one partner financially supporting the other in migration or for their migrations to be connected through spousal visas. As Raghuram has commented regarding 'tied' migration 'women are usually cast as the followers, and losers within patriarchal systems within the context of this form of migration' (2004, p.304). Using an arbitrary way of deciding who would migrate illustrates 'how certain decision-making frameworks are structured by social forces', as Matthew Hayes (2014, p.1955) has argued, because the male partner found work first. The social, political and cultural contexts, which generally favour the male partner, exert force over their attempts at equality.

We can see wider social forces at work in Alina and Raúl's relationship. Alina said:

Alina: The next step couldn't be Raúl to come [to] Romania because it's not an economical situation where you can work in English or stuff like that, it's a bit more closed market so we said "OK, it definitely has to be Belgium or somewhere in Western Europe."

Raúl: Yeah! [...] the decision is easy, I mean Romania, no. But if you want an easier life at the moment Belgium is a better place than Romania.

We might question Raúl's notions of an 'easier' life and a 'better' place. As Lulle has pointed out 'the good (or, at least, better) life is understood differently across diverse contexts' (2023, p.316). Alina said of her migration to Brussels,

Alina: I didn't manage [to find a job] because here [Belgium] it's a lot requested French and Dutch besides English. And back then I used to know only English and Romanian, er French I used to know but very few [little]— it wasn't enough so I couldn't get a job, at least not in the time we gave each other. So, then I said OK, last solution, it was to do a master's in engineering here in Brussels in French so then I can learn French and that was it.

She found a course in Brussels, however, funding the degree was difficult:

Raúl: There were more issues like financial. She's coming here [...] for studying. She also worked a bit.

Alina: For me and my family it's a lot important the financial independence so that was quite hard because for my parents, [home country] parents, [...] they earn 300 euros that's the medium salary in [home country]. It's hard to keep a master's degree in Belgium so that was really hard to accept [...] I used to work as a student a lot to cover my payments, but yeah in the beginning I had to accept Raúl's help so. It's hard for accept that. For me and for my family.

It is difficult to read this part of their narrative without sensing the struggle that Alina had trying to move to Brussels.⁴ It seems at odds with Raúl's assertion that it would be easy. As she had not been able to find a job in 'the time that they gave each other' she had to undertake another academic qualification in a language that she did not feel proficient in while also taking on part-time work. She was left feeling tired and stressed, as she discusses:

⁴ She may have faced other difficulties such as racism. Being from Romania she is thus "lumped" into "Eastern Europeanness" [which] can act as a disempowering marker' (Lulle, 2020, p. 641) and be stigmatised (Wilken and Ginnerskov Dahlberg, 2017), thus impeding acceptance.

Alina: Yeah, for me was really hard.

Raúl: Far from the family.

Alina: And with all the new language and Master's in a new language [...] and also coming every day, every night and saying, "I cannot anymore!" for three months. I think every day I cried out loud saying I don't even want to speak French, neither English I just want to [speak] Romanian.

Alina's dedication to making the migration a success suggests that she was 'embracing neoliberal ideologies that laud perseverance, entrepreneurship, resourcefulness and independence' (Lulle, 2023, p.316) which foster the subjectivity of 'a good migrant' and can lead to a more 'liveable life' (ibid. p.323). The financial costs of the degree also had an impact on her parents' identities as providers as they were not able to cover the fees and Alina 'had to accept Raúl's help'.

In Alina and Raúl's narrative we see how power is distributed, unequally, through gender and nationality to prescribe which identities are powerful in different places (Mahler and Pessar, 2001). The power geometries (Massey, 1994, p.149) at work here put Raúl 'in a position of control' (p.149). The process for him was significantly less arduous which he acknowledged when he said, 'for me it was not that hard, it was more hard for you [Alina]'.

Experiences of de-skilling are common for highly skilled female migrants (e.g. Yeoh and Willis, 2005). Riaño's (2012) research with skilled female migrants to Switzerland showed significant numbers were either unemployed or were overqualified for their jobs. Gühlich (2017, p.76) has shown that along with their experiences of de-skilling, women migrants often experienced 'a loss of self-confidence and loss of autonomy' (2017, p.76). One way that the migrants in Gühlich's study dealt with losing confidence was to 're-skill' or gain additional qualifications and language skills. However, research has shown that there are limitations to how much skilled migrant women can benefit from re-skilling without supportive social and professional networks (Gühlich, 2017; Riaño, 2021). In Alina's case, her relationship with Raúl, also an engineer, may have benefitted her by providing links to professional networks.

As white, educated Europeans both Alina and Raúl have high degrees of cultural capital. However, Raúl's economic and ethno-national capital were greater than Alina's. By remaining in Belgium, he was able to produce and negotiate his identity as provider in their relationship; the balance of power in their relationship is maintained, even amplified when

Alina moves to Belgium. Alina and Raúl's experiences resonate with previous research which has demonstrated that gender roles are often maintained in migration (Radcliffe, 1990; Chant, 1992; Silvey, 2000; Schrover and Moloney, 2013). And while Alina was striving for and achieving a career by gaining more academic qualifications, learning a third language and therefore increasing her cultural capital, she becomes dependent on Raúl and his family financially, socially and emotionally. Although, she had access to financial support from Raúl and his family, a financial debt (whether required to be repaid or not) (re)produces the financial disparities between the couple and bring the economic and gendered power geometries of the wider social world into the intimate sphere of their relationship and into the relationship between their families.

The complexities of gender and power are revealed through the discursive construction of Alina and Raúl's narrative. Raúl acknowledges the difficulties Alina faced through migrating. Their body language and the emotion in their voices during this part of their narrative suggested to me that he was empathic to Alina's situation. He was supportive of Alina, and he remained sure of his conviction that migrating to Brussels was the better option. Raúl has at his disposal power through physical resources, such as housing and money from a wealthy European country as well as an education and connections there (van Hooff, 2013, p.41) which he mobilised in their migration negotiations. They both benefitted from living in a wealthy European country, for example Alina has gained further education and got a well-paid job as an engineer. Raúl did not have to undertake any further education or learn any more languages. He was also able to remain with his family and friends.

Other couples experienced imbalances in their relationship. For example, Gloria and Pietro discussed how Gloria took on many administrative tasks, such as talking to their landlord, because she speaks Spanish. Their narrative then moved on to other tasks:

- Pietro: But yes, 50/50, you've got your part ...
- Gloria: No. Well, for that I don't really mind; for cleaning things I mind.
- Yvonne: That doesn't require Spanish. [All laughing]
- Pietro: Well, it's because, with that, we don't have the same threshold of supporting cleaning.
- Gloria: Because I do much more ... Yes, that's right.
- Pietro: But we have other things. I usually cook a bit more than her.
- Gloria: No, I know, I know – it's because she asked. I wouldn't complain, but it's true that sometimes I wish you hang the clothes downstairs and...which you did, you did once.

Pietro: The real thing is that, for example, she worked two days a week, when I do five, and a bit more sometimes.

Gloria and Pietro's narrative brings to mind Jamieson's critique of the idea that couple relationships are a site of equality and democracy and, as Jamieson says, gender inequalities remain (1999, p.484). If we are conditioned to accept such (im)balances within heteronormative models of love and couple relationships then they can be difficult to notice and harder to change. In their research on couples, Roseneil et al. discuss the space of the couple as compelling. They argue that rehearsing couple norms creates a feeling of safety and as these norms have become internalised, going against them is difficult because 'internal sanctions against breaches of the couple-norm reinforce the sense of the naturalness and superiority of coupledness' (2020, p.227) So, patterns of inequity in couple relationships come to be seen as 'normal' and accepted and thus remain unchallenged.

Couples can still develop meaningful love relationships even when some inequalities remain because, as Carol Smart has pointed out, how couples themselves speak about gendered relations and roles within their relationships is most revealing of how societal norms operate (2007, p.177). However, I am attentive to the ways that love can be a form of power. As Wilkinson notes, feminist research has demonstrated that some dominant forms of romance, family and household organisation uphold patriarchal structures (Wilkinson, 2014, p.240). Everyday intimacies and couple norms can impede progressive change and mute challenging discourses.

There is also a complex relationship between financial and emotional (in)dependence in Aoife and Alfredo's narrative. Aoife had a high-powered and well-paid role in a multi-national company which gave her the opportunity travel in a luxurious manner and lead a comfortable lifestyle. They talked about a trip they had made to Vienna, Aoife travelling from Australia for business and Alfredo travelling from Spain to meet Aoife. The trip established to them that they had different levels of income and related expectations:

Aoife: I said "Do you wanna meet for a weekend in Vienna?" [...] with certain airlines I have a driver that picks me up at the airport and Alfredo was like what the f... is this a driver?

Alfredo: And it was like [...] I don't know I usually travel with baggage or sandalias [sandals] or this type of way yeah. No, it's like no I don't feel comfortable.

Aoife also said she thought the hotel was ‘terrible [...] it's cheap’ whereas Alfredo thought it was ‘fantastic’. Alfredo said that he was uncomfortable with the kind of lifestyle Aoife was used to. His discomfort may have arisen from a dislike of luxury, although his enthusiasm about the hotel might suggest that it was not the luxury itself which was problematic; rather the notable difference in their earning power seems to have been more concerning. Aoife seemed uncomfortable being the primary wage earner in the relationship. She said:

Aoife: Alfredo could only come to Australia as a student [...] and then he can only work 20 hours a week so that was gonna be a bit of a pressure as well, right? Because new relationship and I'm gonna have to fund him and things like that.

Another couple had different views about how to negotiate their migration. Katherine had been living and working in Asia when she met Juan. After approximately a year in a distance relationship with him, she moved to Barcelona, leaving her well-paid job, which she enjoyed. Before she migrated, she had prepared by enrolling in a master's programme in Spain which gave her access to a student visa. A prudent migratory strategy, it was also a way of providing herself with a meaningful purpose in Barcelona, as she describes it,

Katherine: It was really important to me that I had something here that... I mean [...] I chose Spain because you [Juan] were here, but I needed to and wanted to have something for myself as well so that's yeah, when I was looking for master's programmes to do and found one best suited me.

Through the master's programme Katherine was able meet people and establish her own social networks. She found work at the university in their marketing department. She took deliberate decisions to ensure that she was not entirely dependent on her partner, either socially or financially once she moved to Spain. Her independence did not eliminate Juan's feelings of responsibility:

Juan: I felt a lot of pressure, she's coming here and I knew that the first argument you're "I've left everything and I came here for you!" [...] and so and that put me in a losing situation always in any discussion because you will say that and it's true and what can I say? [...] so, we had this conversation that [...] I felt the pressure of [her] coming and me having the responsibility of you feeling welcome and ...so and she said she was taking this decision she wanted, she was

the only [one] responsible and she will accept the consequences.

Katherine: Of course, and I still feel like that.

Yvonne: And do you feel responsible?

Juan: Yeah!

Katherine: And you still feel responsible? Why?

Juan: What do you mean why? Because you are waiting for me. Although she's having good time here. She's partying more than me, and she has more friends now (laughs).

Juan simultaneously positions himself as a provider who ought to be responsible, and distances himself from providing that role. His narrative brings into focus the idea of hegemonic masculinity which underpins the idea of 'tied' migration. Kofman and Raghuram, writing in 2005, said that 'the model of hegemonic masculinity where women follow merely as appendages, cede to the career aspirations of the male partner, and become the trailing spouse, is both partial and deeply problematic' (2005, p.153). More recent research focusing on the specificities of labour markets has addressed the issue of women being conceptualised as followers, but as Raghuram (2004) noted, more focus on the decision-making processes in relation to available opportunities could expand knowledge about women's roles. Further, Kõu, Mulder and Bailey (2017) have argued in their research on linked lives in highly skilled migration that women who seek out opportunities in the migration process become active agents (2017, p.2791).

When Katherine first arrived in Spain, she moved into Juan's flat but moved out shortly after. Moving out helped her establish her own networks and assert her autonomy. Finding her own apartment, studying at university and establishing her own friendship networks were practical ways of performing and asserting her identity as a woman who is independent. Maintaining her independence seems to have been particularly important to her around the time of her migration as a way of mitigating the discontinuity in her identity which migration and subsequent change of roles and status might bring. Cancian argued in 1987 that 'women are judged by a masculine standard and their close ties to others are interpreted as a sign of being [...] insufficiently individuated' (p.5), so Katherine works hard to avoid being

'redomesticated' (Yeoh and Willis, 2005) and having the gendered identity of 'housewife' (or stepmother) imposed upon her (Yeoh and Willis, 2005).

Meanings afforded to the gendered nature of migration are entwined with social understandings of gender roles. Smart has noted in relation to studies of how couples manage money in their relationships that 'the focus on "objective" gender inequality tends to push the meanings that couples give to their own style of money management into the background' (2007, p.175). She argues that individuals' own assessments of gender equality in their lives can be passed over by the researcher who 'may feel that she "knows"' more than the participant because social theory has highlighted invisible modalities of gender inequality in relations to money (p.174). Smart questions how to reconcile personal meanings with social meanings, particularly in relation to difficult topics such as gender equality, and argues that researchers need to recognise that meaning changes over time and may be different for different people in different relationships. The context of Smart's argument is somewhat different, but I draw on it here to suggest that migration can be thought of in the same way; while for some women migrating for a relationship might be seen as relinquishment of independence, it does not represent forfeiture for all women. Further, how the migration is viewed within a relationship might change over time such that what was initially seen as an act of love and passion, associated with adventure, hope and aspiration for the future (Gauthier, 2017), could become attendant to disappointment, frustration and desperation. Thus, one partner migrating 'for' the other cannot be read as a straightforward indication of power within a relationship. As it is so frequently a female partner who de- or re-skills through migration, the intricacies of power and gender must be given sufficient attention, particularly when the ideology of love can work to obscure patriarchal power. Attention to the emotional aspects, such as the weight of responsibility Juan felt when Katherine migrated, can shed light on how power ebbs and flows in their own lives (Kolehmainen and Juvonen, 2018) and provide context for the choices they make (Smart, 2007).

In sum, viewing the economic and associated gendered contexts through the lens of love gives a detailed emotional and nuanced perspective on why couples migrate for love. Importantly, using love as an analytic frame shows how social love stories intersect with personal understandings of love in love migrant couples' lives and reveals how they are intertwined with economic and gender concerns, both social and personal.

4.5 The (Un)importance of Destination

In this section, I examine how love migrant couples decided *where* to migrate. I analyse the role the destination plays in love migrant relationships through attention to how place is discursively constructed in their narratives: often as an (un)important backdrop or a 'neutral' space. Emphasising neutrality creates room for narrative constructions of place which reflect the couples' understandings of, and aspirations for, their relationship and the specificities of places are muted. Yet, in other parts of love migrant narratives the importance of geographical location as one aspect of the spatialities of love migration becomes more prominent. I am attentive to the contextual and contingent nature of how love and place are connected and this is drawn out through analysis of the ways that place does become salient and makes itself felt for love migrants.

I build on theorisations about couple migration among the highly skilled to show the multiple and competing emotional motives which affect their decisions about where to migrate. The section contributes to debates about relationships between migrants and the host country by showing how the most intimate emotional concerns about their love relationships influence their decisions about possible and actual migration sites and their experiences of them. The destination as both important facilitator of, and unimportant backdrop to, love migrant relationships is analysed and unpacked in terms of how the destination is closely tied to other aspects of love migrants' lives.

Destination was of secondary importance in the negotiation of migration for some couples. Beatriz and Jesús were living in Brussels and in this section of their narrative they talk about their first migration together to Bratislava:

Beatriz: It's like we didn't know anything about the city, about the country in fact— we had to look it up on a map the first time we got the job.

Jesús: It was like yeah okay I've heard of this before, but I cannot place it on a map and we said like "Yeah sure why not" I mean [...] like we just wanted to be together, we didn't care where, so we said yeah let's go for it.

Beatriz and Jesús were not moving to the place because of the place itself. Making the destination a secondary concern distinguishes their approach from that of other groups of migrants, such as lifestyle migrants who tend to prioritise the specific qualities of the

destination (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009; Sampaio and King, 2019). Unlike other groups of migrants, love migrants prioritise the destination for how it facilitates their couple relationship. Beatriz and Jesús migrated to Bratislava even though they did not particularly seem to enjoy it; Jesús said Bratislava was 'not as welcoming as other places' and they elaborated,

Beatriz: Bratislava is still a pretty closed society; they're not really used to having foreigners around so it's all a bit... not as welcoming as other places.

Jesús: Yeah like nowadays is just opening to foreign people because a lot of big companies are going there because it's cheaper and everything so it's like it's been a big boom in the last I don't know three, four years and now there are a lot of foreign people in Bratislava but they are not still used to, to foreign people [...] but it was like we wanted to be together.

Their motivation to migrate to Bratislava is that they could be together there. Despite being young adults, Beatriz and Jesús' motivations differ from 'youth migrants' who mostly prioritised finding work (León Himmelstine and King, 2019), as Beatriz and Jesús prioritised being together. As highly skilled, European migrants, Beatriz and Jesús enjoyed relative autonomy in deciding where to migrate but still elected to live somewhere that they did not particularly like because it allowed their relationship to develop.

Similar views were voiced by another couple, Agnes and Gabriel, about their decision to move to Brussels:

Gabriel: Brussels is not the most exciting city.

Agnes: It's not that we dream of being in Brussels forever individually [or] together.

The host country is seen as a temporary place to develop the relationship. While the two couples above were in relatively new relationships, couples whose relationships were more established also expressed similar views. For example, Sarah and Allie talked about how they had actively encouraged a relocation package for Allie as they had wanted to experience living in different countries. They considered the available destinations and explained,

Allie: We didn't go to New York because I would have been working until ten o'clock every night and you never would have seen me.

Sarah: We wanted somewhere where would we have a relationship.

Sarah became re-domesticated, having to take the lead role in caring for their three children. The imbalances connected to relocating because of one partner's work have shown that often, 'one [partner] becomes the lead migrant and main breadwinner, and the other an accompanying spouse' (Coles and Fechter, 2008, p.8). Despite their efforts to find a place where they would be able to have a relationship, the limitations of Sarah's ability to work because of caring responsibilities and visa restrictions, meant their relationship was negatively affected.

Taken together, these narratives highlight that where there is more parity in the couple's migration, as two single people migrating as part of a couple on individual work contracts and visas, there seems to be less disparity in their experiences in the host country. These narratives show the relationship is prioritised in the migration process and highlight that when the place is seen as a facilitator of the relationship, a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the location is tolerated.

Sarah and Allie elaborated on how their choice of destination was also limited because of their sexuality. They said:

Allie: So, we did a short list of countries based on that and you know, Riyadh is off the list of ...Even Paris was not an option.

Yvonne: Paris wasn't an option?

Sarah: We have to be married, so you can be married in France now, so it's not a discriminatory law.

Allie: But you can't be married in [home country].

Sarah: There's no marriage equality law in [home country] yet.

The political implications of being an unmarried and lesbian couple in both Riyadh and Paris, disqualified them as destinations. Another couple, Jerome and Theo, faced similar decisions about a previous migration opportunity; a job opportunity for Jerome had presented the possibility for migration but they did not take it as they could not find a place which recognised gay marriage. Theo said:

Theo: Four years ago, they were looking, his company was looking at moving us over

here, having him responsible for more Eastern Europe, and the Balkans and Greece and that, and sadly, I was the one ... They couldn't find a place that we could live that would recognise our relationship, to give me the visa to come as his spouse, only Western Europe.

When an opportunity came up to migrate to Brussels, which Jerome described as 'pretty liberal', they could be relocated as an expatriate couple. Here we can also see that they had previously turned down relocation opportunities because they could not go as a couple. However, their narrative showed that like other couples who relocate for one partner's work, Theo became re-domesticated and talked of the long days he spent alone while Jerome was at work. In a related but slightly different way, the approach to gay couples factored into Leon's migration to Barcelona to be with his partner Mariano. Leon is Belgian and had lived in Brussels for most of his life, where he had previously been married and had children. In his 60s he came out as gay, met Mariano and they began a relationship. Once he retired, he relocated to Barcelona not because they felt Brussels was unwelcoming to gay couples but because Leon felt that he had too much family history in that city to be able to pursue their relationship in the way they wanted.

These stories together illustrate the complex ways that the destination cities shape decisions about where to migrate. How places are imagined to be able to facilitate love migrant couples' relationships as well as actual regulatory limitations influence where they will and can migrate. This section has highlighted how the salience of place shifts across love migrant narratives.

4.5.1 Environment and Lifestyle

The apparent neutrality or insignificance of place is contingent. There are limitations and parameters, specific to each couple, which render places (un)desirable as migration destinations, and in the following extracts these are connected to environment and to family ties. The narratives show the complex interrelatedness of the desire to be together and the desire to have or avoid place-contingent factors. The love migrant narratives in this thesis tend to frame the migration as relatively free from constraints and overwhelmingly an emotional or romantic act. The portrayal of place as incidental in these narratives contributes to their

representation of migration as unrestricted and relates to the way that love is performed in mobility. The narratives presented in this section, however, underscore that love migrants are not without constraints even when they possess significant social capital. The discussion also highlights the multiple and sometimes competing directions in which love migrants are pulled. Decisions about place carry wider implications for understanding how love is performed in mobility, as the negotiations and compromises related to place are intrinsic to the performance of love in migration.

For example, Elsa and George had met while living in George's hometown, Dublin. He had previously spent time in Spain and Elsa is from Tenerife. They left Dublin and migrated to Barcelona together because they found Dublin oppressive. They explained,

Elsa: But I think here (Barcelona) it's easier as in like [you] wake up in the morning and think, I'll just go for a walk, or let's just do something. I think in Dublin because of the weather you have to kind of plan, or maybe you think, okay, we're going to go for a hike, and we can't because it's raining.

George: Yes. Barcelona's lovely. Getting up in the morning [in Dublin] and it could be raining, and you'd be like, "What will we do?" There's nothing to do. And then you end up getting annoyed because you're at home. There's nothing on. And we'd end up just kind of giving out to each other [arguing] for no reason, you know?

Climate and weather impacted on Elsa and George's mood and consequently on their relationship. Similarly, Camilla and Rolf, speaking more generally about climate, discussed the impact that climatic differences between his home country and Florida, USA, Camilla's home state, had on their decisions about where to live:

Camilla: I think [Northern Europe] is an amazing and a beautiful country, but I'm from [...], Florida. [...] I have summer all year long and I'm a little bit scared about going to a country that has 10 months of winter.

Rolf: I think you had a bit of a bad experience when you came to [Northern Europe] in November.

Camilla: It was dark at 2pm!

Rolf: So that really frightened her and then also it's a bit, it's cold.

- Camilla: And I'm from [Florida] [laughs]
- Rolf: And I mean from, you know being in a happy place, not having sun a lot when you're used to it changes a lot, I think it changes a lot with your mind, how it works.
- Camilla: And those are like real fears I have about being in a place that has 10 months of winter, how psychologically that could affect me
- Rolf: 9 months
- Camilla: 9 months, I'm sorry [all laugh] 9 months of winter!

Like other aspects of our environment, our relationships with weather can be deeply emotional (Vannini et al., 2012) and are 'produced as much as [they are] experienced' (Vannini et al., 2012, p.364). Therefore, they can be part of the performance of identities, such that 'awareness of local climate becomes an awareness of identity and difference' (Berland, 1994, p.100) which permeates intimate relationships. Taken together, these two narratives highlight both the real and imagined emotional effects of weather upon the couple and their relationship. Weather and climate are part of our habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) or body and place 'ballets' (Seamon, 1980) which inform our understandings of the world. Thus, our relationships with temperature, light, humidity and so on become part of the routines of our lives and these are 'intertwined with emotion, meaning and memory' (Hsu, 2008, p.440) so as climate and weather envelop us, they become part of our 'personal, social, and collective identity' (2008, p.373).

4.5.2 Family Ties

Family connections also influenced love couples' decisions about where to migrate. Literature on transnational families has shown that many migrants hold the view that 'personal care can only be directly exchanged during periods of co-presence' (Baldassar, 2007b). Visits are therefore an important avenue for the provision of all forms of care (Baldassar 2007a, 2007b; 2008). The idea that caregiving requires proximity has been critiqued (Baldassar, 2007b) as caring can take many forms including phone calls, emails and remittances, which are all forms of providing emotional and practical care (Wilding, 2006; Baldassar, 2007a, 2007b). However, what Baldassar has delineated as 'crisis visits' often require 'the provision of "hands on"

personal care or respite care, and usually in response to a sudden emergency' (2008, p.261). These concerns were prevalent in the narratives of love migrants. For Gabriel and Agnes, moving to Brussels allowed them to stay close to their families:

Agnes: I want to be not far from my family and if you stay in Europe [...] even now something happens in [France] I have a plane and in two hours I'm there so [...] I want that for sure.

Gabriel: It's important being close to the family, logistically close to the family [it] is important and also, I wouldn't like to live like in a country like for example you know in the United States. They are a first world country, but they are very far so...

Similarly, Gloria, and Pietro live in Barcelona as it allows them both to be close to their families:

Pietro: I've found that I don't want to be too far, because my grandfather died [and] my father had some problems [...] I mean, if [...] it would be outside Europe, then maybe it's too far. She [has her] family, but always we have the discussion that she wants to be close to them.

In his interview Derek revealed similar sentiments when he commented:

Derek: I like the feeling that I can just jump on a train and at least be close to one of our families.

These comments as a whole show that the migrants share a concern about needing to provide in-person care for family members and their desire to stay close to family influenced how they determined where they could migrate. Engaging in discourse about caring for their parents is itself a way of performing the identity of a caring adult child. These performances are part of the way that people display and 'do' family (Finch and Mason, 1993; Finch, 2007). Love migrants create an imagined future (Baldassar, 2008) in which they travel to them to provide care to parents. Constructing an 'imagined co-presence' (Baldassar, 2008, p.252) could be a way for these migrants, who are adult children, to express and negotiate feelings of missing their parents.

In contrast Diego and Lupita's narrative shows their desire to be *away* from their families was a catalyst in their love migration,

Lupita: When we came here, they [her parents] were like “Okay why are you going to live together?” [...] like you have to explain much more. We had to explain a lot and then we got on the plane, and it was like pphhhhhheewwwwww we are gone!

Diego: It was kind of that because of as Lupita was saying, in Chile things are conservative in that sense.

Lupita: Actually, we like to not have our families here.

Diego: Definitely. We were running away from that [...] to have [...] time for... Like you don't have to go every Sunday to your parents' house.

Their narrative shows that geographical location becomes salient as an aspect of spatiality for the couple. Place can be central to the creation of couple bonds. Destination wedding marketing portrays landscape as a place where the couple can be 'alone together in nature' (Johnston, 2006, p.199), away from family and guests. The couple become the sole focus, thus familial and social responsibilities which might be associated with marriage are less important. Presenting the couple as an isolated unit also recalls the centrality and ubiquitousness of the couple relationship that other researchers have pointed out (Jamieson, 1998, 1999; Roseneil et al., 2020). Needing space for their couple relationship was present throughout Diego and Lupita's narrative as they talked about the camping trips they would regularly take out of the city. These trips presented a socially acceptable way for them, an unmarried couple, to be alone together. Their love migration could be seen as a continuation of how they created space for them to develop their relationship on their own terms.

4.5.3 Neutral Places

Some couples tried to find a 'middle ground' in the migration destination. I met Jana and Mark in London. They explained:

Jana: We stay here in London because in London we have, sort of, a halfway home.

Mark: It's probably a five-hour trip, door to door to get to hers. It's a five-hour trip door to door to get to mine.

They focus on the amount of time it takes for each to get to their hometowns from London to determine what for them signifies 'middle ground'. Emphasising travel time as an indication of the middle and therefore 'fair' place to live neglects that Mark is in his home country and is therefore not subject to the visa requirements or other legal checks a non-national might be. He can use his first language in everyday situations, and he can reach his family by train whereas Jana would need to travel internationally by plane to reach hers. Being near to their homeland is significant in the lives of transnational couples allowing for the possibility of visits and the perception of nearness fostering a sense of security (Acedera and Yeoh, 2019, p.259).

London was an equal footing in other ways for Mark and Jana; Mark grew up in the Northwest of the UK and he felt that living in his hometown which he described as 'quite a working class, maybe deprived sort of area' was a substantially different experience to living in London. Jana said that 'London is our place that we are both kind of foreigners in'. They had both moved to London independently at approximately the same time, so shared a similar temporal association with the city. Again, the degree of foreignness they might experience in relation to the city might be experientially distinct. One way in which ethno-national difference is embodied is in language as Jana explained her frustrations 'when you can't get all the [...] words', referring to the occasional language difficulties she experienced.

Correspondingly, Camilla and Rolf had moved to Barcelona when on university exchange programmes and had familiarised themselves with the city independently. When they were discussing whether to stay in Barcelona or not Camilla said:

Camilla: Barcelona was like a good middle ground because it's not my home country and it's not his home country and we both fell in love with the city on its own so [...] it was a good place for us to exist together [...] I think at this stage it was important for it to be as neutral as possible.

Rolf: I still have my friends here and stuff and interests.

They were keen to find a place which they could both feel at home in, but which was 'neutral' as it was 'not my home country and it's not his home country', as Camilla said. Their emphasis on equality and balance in their search for a city to live in together reflects their understanding

of love. They explained,

Camilla: I think just to have a healthy relationship in general it has to be two people making compromises and two people both doing fifty percent of the work and I think that's why 'neutral', and balance and all those things are so important and so, it's definitely something I believe in and something that he believes in as well.

Rolf: We still need to figure it out. We're trying to find a balanced solution.

Camilla: I think it was important for us that like we didn't start in anyone else's country first, so that we were on neutral territory, and it is like not anyone's home so there were struggles [but it's] as balanced as it could be.

Rolf: As balanced as it could get.

The place represents a 'compromise' for them. Their choice of destination is one way of enacting egalitarianism within their relationship as it involves emotional give and take from both (Giddens, 1992). The idea of balance and dividing the relationship 'work' (Hochschild, 1983) was important to them and permeated their decision about where to live. Just as they wanted to find balance in their relationship, they wanted balance in their relationships to the city. For them, balance was expressed by finding a 'neutral' place. Equally, for Dawida, a Polish woman, and her partner Matteo, an Italian, neutrality was important. She said:

Dawida: Brussels is a perfect place, because as an expat, you don't feel that much as an expat, because probably also, our fault not going outside our so-called bubble, but all my friends are really international, so they come from many different countries. So, they're all not in their place. And, for us too, we were both not ... It's not our place, for none of us.

The place is important because it is not part of either one's background. Dawida expanded on the difficulties she felt when she visited Italy, her partner's country as he was at home, and she was outside of that:

Dawida: When I go to Italy, even though now I've tried to learn some Italian, I find it

difficult to communicate with Matteo's friends who don't really speak English [...] and people from the North of Italy [...] they're not so forward [...] whereas I'm like this, and I'm blocked sometimes.

Dawida's comment above shows the intricate connections between place, language and identity. As they have different first languages, they primarily communicate in English with each other. As Dawida says:

Dawida: Our language is funny because it's like a hybrid.

Thus, it appears that they find the middle ground also through language as English does not 'belong' to either of them. As Dawida pointed out, 'I also graduated as an English teacher [...] but I cannot compete with native speakers' which gives her an advantage in English and as language carries "emotional weight" (Dewaele, 2008, p.4) her competence could create an imbalance in their relationship.

These attempts to find 'neutral' zones and 'middle grounds' can be seen as ways of performing relationship 'work' (Hochschild, 1983) to try to attain equality in the relationship. These discourses which emphasise compromise, balance and equality, are an example of 'gender work' (Mahler and Pessar, 2001, p. 442) as the partners display their effort to strive for parity to one another. These discussions about neutrality and middle grounds emphasise their importance in the lives of love migrants and connect to the discourses we saw earlier in the chapter about equality, but as Csíkszentmihályi and Halton remind us, 'the material environment that surrounds us is rarely neutral' (1981, pp.16-17).

Sonya and Derek, who also lived in Brussels, had been considering moving to London, but Sonya had reservations. She said:

Sonya: What's really weird is we're thinking a little bit of moving to London [...] I had that sudden panic a couple of weeks ago going "Oh no! What's gonna happen if we move back to your place, where your old friends are and where you are the local? We've never done this, what's that gonna do to us?" Do we really want to do that? [...] it has crossed my mind though, actually, that for the first time in a long time I would be moving to a place where I'd be with locals.

Being with Derek's friends and other 'locals' is problematic for Sonya, but even though Derek might share some linguistic, cultural and national heritage with other Britons, we should not

assume that he would straightforwardly be the same as them, or that Sonya was straightforwardly different. His time spent living in other countries, or even his relationship with Sonya might indicate difference to some of the social groups he has in the UK as there can be tensions and differences between and within mobile and non-mobile groups (O'Reilly, 2016). Thus, we should not uncritically accept ideas about insiders and outsiders (Crang, 2003; Scott and Ganga, 2006; Carling, Erdal and Ezzati, 2014)

But Sonya's comments extend to the idea of herself being a local as shown in their discussion about moving to Munich which she said was 'fairly international' but 'weirdly close to where I'm from'. Her comments about feeling international and local raise questions about what being at 'home' might mean. Thus, we might gather that it is the idea of being local as opposed to international which she is uneasy with. Sonya is considering how the already existing human relationships in a particular place would affect Derek and their love relationship. If we turn to Conradson's understanding of place as a 'constellation of human, non-human and material entities, coinciding and interacting with each other' (2005, p.113), then place is not only the physical or geographical space, but a combination of the material manifestations of that place and of the relationships in it.

The embodied experiences of these love migrants affect how they feel about dwelling in particular places. As Urry says, 'places [...] carry traces of the memories of different social groups who have lived in or passed through that place' (2005, p.79). Sonya explained that they got engaged in Bruges as it was the 'only romantic city' which neither one had had relationships in with others in the past:

Sonya: Derek really made an effort so that we would go somewhere, but that we would go somewhere that isn't related to anyone else's relationship past, like Paris would be the obvious choice, it's an hour away but I've lived there with my ex-boyfriend so we couldn't go there. And Cologne is two hours away, but that's where his ex-girlfriends were, then London, not really. So, we were like "Oh no [...] where are we gonna go that's really [...] gonna belong to us and not to someone else as well." [...] Belgium is really ours.

The 'imagined presence' (Urry, 1995, p.79) of past relationships lingered in Sonya and Derek's present. Cities have emotional resonance for their inhabitants and 'memories are a persistent feature of people's experiences of the city and city life' (Pile, 2005, p. 137). As such, past relationships might be viewed as an 'emotional burden that ghosts place upon the living, as they haunt the very streets of the city [...] through the emotional chords they strike' (Pile,

2005, p.136). Thus, Sonya's fears that the 'ghost' of one of Derek's past relationships might appear in their present influences their choices about where to go.

Conclusion

My aim in this chapter was to analyse the negotiations about love migration in relation to the lived experiences of love migrant couples' lives. Through attention to the intimate domain of these couples' lives I sought to examine how love feels and is practised through mobility. I evaluated how meaning is attached to migration to become part of the reasons why love migrant couples choose to migrate.

Theorising on love has proposed that it is verbal disclosure which is important in contemporary relationships for fostering love and intimacy and creating emotional closeness (e.g. Giddens, 1992). Yet, the narratives presented in the first section pointedly demonstrate the need for ordinary physical interactions and embodied, sensuous knowledge in the furtherance of couple love relationships. Freya and Dominique's narrative highlighted that their relationship felt stagnant before she migrated and Freya's remark that the relationships could not progress 'naturally' indicates an understanding of couple relationships which perhaps is based on the internalisation of norms about how couple relationships should progress (Roseneil et al., 2020). Through attention to sensory experiences and feelings in their narratives, I demonstrated that couples understand their emotions in an embodied way (Lupton, 1998; Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b; Smart, 2007; Longhurst, 2013; Walsh, 2018) and that embodied desire and longing contribute to their migratory flows.

Narratives which spoke of the uses made of technology also speak to the importance of physical proximity. Camilla and Rolf's narrative shows the importance of sensory experiences and illustrates the extent that love migrant couples go to in order to increase their sensory contact. When technology breaks down, it emphasises the separation that love migrant couples felt.

Freya and Dominique also spoke of the way time felt ruptured, shifting continuously between the pressure of making time feel special and feeling that time was wasted or a countdown until they were apart again. Time was felt heavily in their dialogue and it speaks to the concept of time not just as an objective, social construct, but as a subjective experience (Bildtgård and Öberg, 2017, p. 159) which is also embodied. Their narrative shows how it influenced their experiences together, as a couple creating a sense of shared couple time which

itself was orchestrated by outside organisations of time as well in relations to expected timescales, normative time, regarding the development of a relationship.

In the second section, Joanna and Bernard's narrative spoke to the meaning often attached to migration by love migrants in relation to underlying ideas about 'real' love and what love should be. Moving geographically closer was narrated as indicative of commitment in Gabriel and Agnes' narrative, showing that meaning is attached to migration in more companionate understandings of love. Their narrative shows how the notion that love is a 'test' is implicit in their understandings of love, which is connected to the idea that enduring obstacles demonstrates the intensity and veracity of love, and these understandings shape their decisions and negotiations about their migration and relationship. This contradicts theorisations that people only stay in relationships for as long as they are convenient, as all the couples' narratives in this section demonstrate tendencies to pursue these relationships even through difficult periods.

Negotiating who would migrate was for many couples based around discourses of equality, with neither partner wanting to prioritise their career over their partners'. Notwithstanding these aims, the context of the wider gendered global labour market often influenced who found work first and therefore who relocated. Furthermore, in their migrations participants experienced difficulties because of linguistic, ethnic and racial, financial and gendered issues. These narratives show that overcoming these problematic situations was seen by the couples as strengthening their relationship. Focusing on the emotional narratives draws out how couples negotiated any wider structural imbalances and how they live with them. It showed how they resist or live alongside these inequities demonstrating the subtle ways that power circulates in these relationships and drawing together the social context with the intimate and personal.

Certain destinations were narrated primarily as spaces which could allow the relationship to exist and flourish and therefore had to present opportunities for both partners to work and socialise. Host cities and countries were sometimes, therefore, discussed in the narratives with a sense of temporariness. Love migration for some of these couples had a sense of permanence with regard to the relationship itself, but less so for the place they were living in. This emphasises the sense of privilege often held by these highly skilled migrants that they could live and belong in multiple places, even without citizenship. Their narratives of place also highlight the importance of equity in these relationships and 'neutral' spaces were highly desirable for the love migrant couples in this thesis.

The next chapter builds on the materialities presented in this chapter to examine the way love is embedded in our material environment and scrutinises how materialities show embodied knowledges which shape love migration.

Chapter 5. Understanding Love and Materiality in Love Migrants' Lives

Introduction

Material culture has been highly significant to research on emotion and varied perspectives have shown that objects help to constitute relationships (Miller, 1998, 2009, 2010); that objects are important in dealing with separation and loss (Ash, 1996; Miller and Parrott, 2009) and consumption and loss (Holmes and Ehgartner, 2021). Research which relates specifically to romance, love and emotion has examined objects given as gifts in the context of marriage (Purbrick, 2003, 2014), conspicuous consumption in the context of marriage (Otnes and Pleck, 2003) and the materialities of love and consumerism (Illouz, 1997, 1998). In this second empirical chapter, I contribute to perspectives on love and materialities by drawing out a further focus, namely, the embodied nature of love and the centrality of materiality and embodiment in understanding emotion. I analyse how objects emerge as active agents which facilitated the couples' articulation of their emotions and their understandings of love. I examine how love suffuses material objects from narratives at different stages of migrant couple relationships. My aim is to show how the embodied and material aspects articulate emotional experiences which are hard to speak. The objects emerge as active agents in the narratives facilitating the couples' articulation of their emotions and expressing their understandings of love.

Objects can focus participants on emotional aspects of their lives (Morrison, 2011) and allow participants to take a different view of their lives (Harper, 2002). The objects functioned partly as mnemonic devices, facilitating recall of past events and emotions. But, with the narratives surrounding them, they took on a life of their own and became central to the participants' narratives of their emotional lives. All the objects are emotionally loaded and show the connectedness of the participants' lives. The objects demonstrated the importance of materiality to how we live our lives and how we understand our emotional lives because we are 'bound affectively to the material world' (Downes, Holloway and Randles, 2018, p.1). Thus, in this chapter I focus on the objects and analyse what they communicate about love in the lives of these migrants.

The chapter is organised into three sections based on when in their relationships the objects the couples chose became significant. In the first section, I analyse how objects which have bodily resonance are vital to establishing relationships. I argue that these objects show

the importance of embodied emotional connections in establishing relationships. The relationships of three couples whose relationships were establishing are examined to understand how objects reflect a desire for embodied closeness. Objects take the place of the partner and are suffused with bodily traces, gathering meaning through close embodied use. In the second section, I analyse how objects are enclosed in narratives that emphasise increasing emotional connections and investment in the relationship. Objects were used to show connections to one's partner and the objects themselves facilitated displays of knowledge and understanding between the partners. Finally, in the third section, I draw on narratives in which objects were chosen from when the relationships were firmly established to the couples. I argue that these objects show the everyday emotional work which continues in relationships. I highlight how these objects are embedded in networks of relationships and life stages.

5.1 Pre-migration Beginnings and Materialising Love

My focus in this section is on objects which were exchanged between the couples at early stages of their relationships. I argue that the physicality of these items helped to establish emotional closeness (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Miller, 2009) between the partners over time (Noble, 2004). In the previous chapter I highlighted couples' discussions of the difficulties of relying on technology for mediated communication and in this chapter the importance of physical touch is further demonstrated. The connection between physicality and emotions, I suggest, demonstrates that we can understand our emotions through the body and therefore that the body is important in becoming close to and familiar with their partner's emotions.

The first object I discuss is a towel which was given to Faye by Carlos when they were travelling. The towel encompasses connections between object, love and the body. They had met when they were both working at a nature park and later, they were travelling together with friends. She said:

Faye: I realised I left my towel [...] at the place where I stayed [...] and we wanted to travel in this valley, but it's quite remote [...] We wanted to travel. He was also with a friend, and we had tents and everything. So, we were like, "Yeah, we'll just go hitchhiking, go in the valley, we'll just put a tent where we want and we'll just adventure." I was like, "No, no we have to go to a city, because I lost my towel and I want my towel." Then he gave his towel to me. So, he was like, "Yeah, just take my towel. I will

dry myself with a T-shirt.”

After a travelling for some days together, they decided to split into two groups:

Faye: So there we split again and I was travelling along the coast and they would go to [name of city] to try to find work and he was like, “No, just keep my towel. I don’t need it” and for me it was like, “Oh [...] you’re travelling already. It’s a bit of an adventure and we had a tent and everything, but, for me, then a towel, for example, was quite necessary [...] So I didn’t understand, but he was like, “Yeah, just go on take towel.” So, for me that was something that I thought, “Wow, he’s special”.

Carlos: Because I also ... I didn’t take a lot of showers [laughs].

Giving Faye his towel was partly a practical solution to allow the group to continue their journey without going back to the city. Additionally, for Faye, being given the towel had emotional significance. As it had been used and not yet washed, it had traces of Carlos on it which would mingle with her own body when she used it. Carlos gave Faye the towel at a point where they were both interested in a relationship; they had a sexual relationship but had not committed to being a couple.



Figure 5.1 The towel which Carlos gave to Faye.

At the time the towel was exchanged, it seemed to have more emotional resonance for Faye. Over time the towel became more important for both, as evidenced by them

choosing it for the interview. Faye said that she still uses it, particularly when they are apart, precisely because she likes that it was his. The towel is special because of its 'evocation of togetherness' (Walsh, 2006a, p. 274) and indicates how objects accrue meaning over time for both partners. Their narrative about the towel demonstrates that meanings attached to objects are, like love, mutually constructed.

Emotional and bodily resonance is also significant in the T-shirt which Gabriel and Agnes chose. They had met and become friends while they were Erasmus exchange students in Prague. They had been living together for six months in Brussels and considered themselves to have been a couple for a year. Agnes said, 'in Prague we were just friends— I was with somebody else [...] we learnt together in the first few weeks, so we were part of a group of friends.' During that time, they got to know each other and when the exchange was over, they spent a lot of time speaking on Skype. They met up again after some time and explained:

Gabriel: We slept together that night and then we kept in touch but [...] very, very casual and very good friends.

Agnes: We were friends on Erasmus and then we were friends not in a relationship, but we were sleeping together.

Gabriel: Yeah, friends with benefits.

Agnes: ...I don't like to say with benefits it sounds...

Gabriel: Okay. Anyway, so well. So, then we had a relationship at that time, but we were not in a couple.

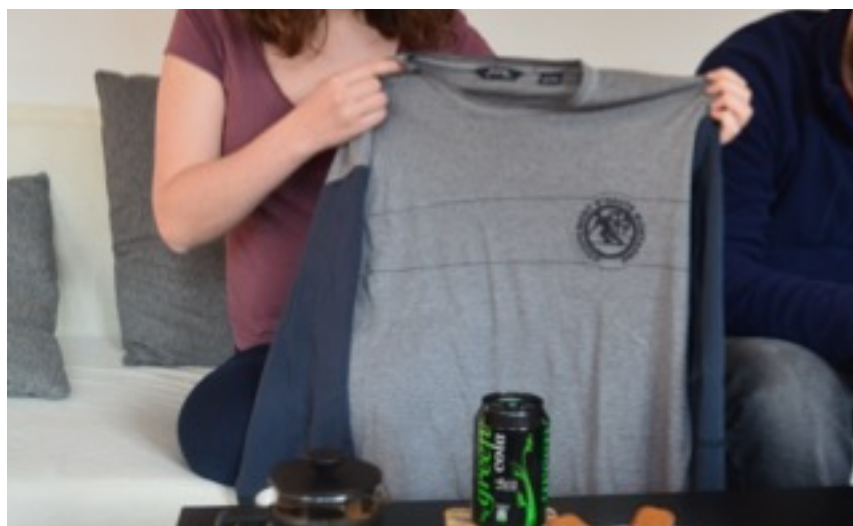


Figure 5.2 The T-shirt that Gabriel gave Agnes.

Their casual long-distance relationship grew in intensity, as Agnes said, 'we talked so

much [...] almost every day and then from time to time we would go and visit each other or go on holiday somewhere else together'. Agnes explained that on one of those visits she had challenged him to a game of pool and had asked for one of his T-shirts as the prize if she won. Gabriel said he had been surprised when she asked him for an item of his clothing, 'for me it was like I was expecting something like "Oh, if you win you have to give me a kiss or have to pay for a beer"' and then...suddenly the stakes were high!' Agnes said she had asked for a T-shirt partly because she is 'terrible at defining bets', which plays down its significance somewhat and counters the idea that it might be an overly intimate item to ask for, and partly because she wanted something 'big'. Their narrative suggests they understood clothing as a significant and emotional item. Clothing is an evocative signifier of the physical presence of a person (Nippert-Eng, 1996) as it is 'intimately tied to our self-presentation and sense of subjectivity' (Lupton, 1998, p.138). Clothing can evoke someone's presence and is imbued with a sense of the person (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Noble, 2004; Miller, 2009) because 'clothes are of human beings as much as the property of human beings' (Ash, 1996, p.219). By asking for an item of clothing, Agnes is not just asking for something of his, but something of him. She perhaps indicates a desire to be closer to Gabriel emotionally and physically and by giving her the T-shirt, he signals his agreement.

Clothes are 'key resources in the ways in which we go about objectifying the complexity and continuity of our selfhood and its relatedness to others, retaining these in the objects and spaces of our everyday environments' (Noble, 2004, p.239). However, clothing is not static; it circulates and flows between friends and family (Gregson and Beale, 2004) and, as my research shows, couples. By giving the T-shirt, Gabriel was allowing his presence to be assimilated into Agnes' everyday environment; something of his being was present with her even when he was not. Through its proximity to the skin and its tactile aspects it not only conveys our subjectivity (Nippert-Eng, 1996), it is a part of our subjectivity. The towel which Carlos and Faye chose also shares these qualities as it is an intimate item used close to the body. Not all towels would have qualities which connected them to a specific person as they are often bought in multiples and regularly washed, keeping them somewhat anonymous. Carlos' towel was made special and particular through the act of giving it to Faye.

Agnes joked that the T-shirt was 'not as warm as you said it was', but the practical aspects were unimportant: what mattered was that it belonged to and had been worn by Gabriel. As with the towel, above, the T-shirt gains and changes its significance over time for them as individuals and as a couple. As Miller says, 'clothing is not forever, it changes and fades and can take on something of the corporality of its wearer. It has features which are gentle and encouraging of this gradual assimilation of one person into another' (2009, p.43). Agnes

indicated that she wanted to be closer to Gabriel, that she wanted to establish a stronger emotional connection between them when she asked for the T-shirt, and Gabriel was indicating that he wanted that too. He expressed a similar sentiment when he said, 'I like that she has some clothes of mine'. Just as the T-shirt held Gabriel's presence, it would over time become imbued with Agnes' too; their presence would mingle in the fabric of the clothing. The T-shirt represents a relaxed, intimate self, one open to female touch (Ash, 1996, p.223), as the towel is also suggestive of intimate touch.

Similarly, a cuddly sheep, given as a gift from Bernard to Joanna, became imbued with bodily traces and emotion over time. They had been living in their own countries for some time when their relationship was beginning. The sheep, which they named 'Potato', was intended to fill the space when they were apart, as Bernard said, 'I gave it to her so she would have somebody to sleep with when I wasn't there'. Joanna did cuddle Potato in bed and with time, the physical traces of the hugs Potato had received had become visible on Potato's worn fur. Joanna commented:

Joanna: It's kind of dirty now.

Bernard: Yes, he's dirty.

Joanna: We were hoping that when we have kids, our kids will like it and then we can tell them, 'This is what Daddy bought Mommy'.

Bernard: It's probably going to be really old and really gross by then.



Figure 5.3 The sheep toy Bernard gave to Joanna

A mass-produced item, the sheep had become an intimate item with time and use.

The subsequent grime and wear the sheep accumulated shows physical manifestations of the embraces Joanna gave it during sleep. Accumulating signs of use created physical traces but also created emotional meaning and made Potato more special to them (Noble, 2004). They see the physical wear and tear simultaneously as 'gross' yet as something to be preserved and handed down to children. Nippert-Eng (1996) has suggested that objects can become extensions of the self. Even mass-produced objects become imprinted with traces of the self which over time makes them autobiographical, as in the case with the sheep and with the towel and the T-shirt above. The sheep was comforting for Joanna. For Bernard too, the idea that a substitute for his own body is being hugged and caressed seems to have been a comforting thought. In addition, wanting to be remembered while he was not there perhaps, speaks of the insecurities felt by both partners when they are separated for a long time.

Taken together, the objects discussed in this section demonstrate that love is manifest materially and embodied. The couples' narratives about their interactions with the objects demonstrate how love 'sticks' (Ahmed, 2004b) to the surfaces of bodies, both human and non-human. Its 'stickiness' mean love can be thought of as 'inter-corporeal' (Ahmed, 2004b, p.83) spreading across the assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988 [2003]) of couple and object. The objects chosen have agency because they facilitated an understanding of these people's emotions by being part of contemplative interactions. Narrative interviews emphasise the discursive dimensions of how love migrants construct their lives in a shared narrative. The objects capture how emotional geographies are manifest materially and proffer a feel for what these couple experienced.

The three couples discussed in this section spent considerable time apart in the early stages of their relationships. Being apart may have some connection to the objects they chose because objects, as Purbrick (2014, p.19) points out,

are powerful things [...] they can express the significance of the person that cannot be contained in words [...] the things given have bodily effects and affects, they produce feelings; they sustain relationships between people, across families that do not see each other, negotiate distance

Proximity with these textiles seemed to allow love migrants to understand their emotions, particularly love, in part through their bodies. Experiencing sensations bodily is an important way that we come understand how we are feeling. Our bodies are integral to how we know our emotions. Bodily knowing is not reducible to the sexual; comfort, proximity and embodiment were perhaps more important in many ways to the couples I spoke to. Sexual contact, while important, was not discussed as a privileged instance of embodied contact (see also Morrison,

2012). More important was the need for emotional knowledge of the self and of one's partner.

How we go about understanding our own emotions involves the body. The embodied nature of emotions suggests that love requires embodied knowledge of the other, and to be known by the other haptically. It highlights the importance of touch in love relationships and speaks to the ways that touch can blend what might be thought of as inner and outer, making touch 'a deeply effective and affecting way to know [...]' (Bacci and Melcher, 2011 p. 110). It also highlights how our bodies are objects which inhabit and interact with our material worlds.

These three couples had already begun sexual relationships when they exchanged these items, so asking for an item of clothing does not seem to have been an indication of sexual desire; it was, perhaps, *more* intimate than that. They wanted to exchange something which was imbued with the presence of one partner for the other to assimilate it into their own. In her discussion of intimacy, Lynn Jamieson suggests that couples are likely to begin sexual relationships 'almost inevitably' (1998, p.131) when they are starting a relationship particularly when society does not look negatively on sex and in fact 'makes sex the obvious next stage' (ibid.). She tells us that sex and intimacy are not always viewed as the same thing by both men and women as 'in so far as women pursue something like 'disclosing intimacy' more typically than men, then women are more likely to be dissatisfied if intimacy is reduced to sex' (ibid.). Jamieson argues that 'seeing sex as all the intimacy you need remains more common among men than women' (ibid.). However, 'disclosing intimacy' relies heavily on 'talking and listening, sharing your thoughts, showing your feelings' (1998, p.1) whereas my research suggests an alternative understanding.

Jamieson's aim is to assess if there had been a shift to disclosing intimacy and to evaluate to what extent disclosing intimacy is found in people's lives. Her conclusions are equivocal, but in her book the body is not central to her discussion of intimacy. Jamieson acknowledges different types of intimacy, not all of which involve disclosing or talking. She says that 'it is possible to imagine a silent intimacy. For example, clearly affection for and feelings of closeness to another person are not necessarily accompanied by a dialogue of mutual disclosure' (1998, p.8). She also mentions proximity as a 'as a way of developing closeness' (ibid.). Jamieson argues, though, that while proximity, closeness and care might be part of intimate relationships they 'are not sufficient conditions to ensure intimacy as it is more generally understood' (ibid.). For example, she says,

[I]oving, caring and sharing are also dimensions of intimacy which have taken on different meanings over time [...] Men and women brought up in the first decades of this century [referring here to the 20th century] describe happy childhoods in which their parents never cuddled them or

told them they were loved. This of course, does not mean the emotional bond was absent but rather that visible displays of affection were not an expected part of their culture. (1998, p.9, emphasis in original)

Delineating cuddling as 'visible displays of affection', positions the act of cuddling as something more external than intimate, more public than private. Display can be an integral part of an intimate relationship and we constantly perform and display both to people who are in relationships with us, and to the wider social world (e.g. Morgan, 1996; Smart, 2007; Gabb, 2011). But cuddles and affection, proximity and touch are not just additional elements to a largely narrated intimacy; physicality is an integral part of intimacy and might be a way of communicating something that words cannot. While Jamieson (1998) acknowledges to some degree that a more physical intimacy can be part of a loving relationship, she seems to unpick and separate the strands of physicality and intimacy rather than identifying points at which they are intertwined.

Jamieson's (1998) analysis demonstrates that there might be something more intimate than sexual contact, and my research builds on this idea. I suggest that an additional intimacy is not always a verbal, 'disclosing intimacy' but communicated through everyday kinds of physical encounter. Perhaps love migrants were able to find another kind of intimacy, in addition to the sexual intimacy, through these objects. In other words, the physical intimacy of sex alone was not perhaps enough to allow love migrants to understand their love. These everyday, mundane objects (a T-shirt, a towel) were imbued with the presence of their owners and became extensions of the self. Beginning as mass-produced objects, they became imprinted with traces of the self which over time made them autobiographical (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Thus, because they were 'imbued with qualities of the self, [they] express[ed] the being of that person' (Csíkszentmihályi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p.190). What was important about the T-shirt and the towel, then, is that they were 'his', that they belong to and had been used by the men in these relationships and that they offered a more mundane, everyday type of intimacy.

Work on material possessions in the home has shown how meaning accumulates (Noble, 2004) in and through these items which can maintain continuity among migrant homes and establish a sense of belonging (Walsh, 2006a, 2006b). Objects, then, are central to subjectivity as they represent our relationships with others across time and space. Morrison's (2012) research on sexual touch has shown that contact between bodies and objects can make the objects meaningful, such as tables and sofas which couples have sex on. Through the domestic furniture which facilitates the sex-lives of the couples in Morrison's study, 'touch is located within the fabric of their everyday life, both materially and metaphorically, and is enmeshed in typically non-sexual materialities of the home' (2012, p.15). As she points out,

examining everyday touch is a novel approach as much work on domestic space and sexual life has focused on non-normative sex (ibid.).

The objects presented in this section of the chapter highlighted the importance of materialities, embodiment and touch for love migrant couples. The interactions love migrants had with these objects was not explicitly sexual, but it was highly intimate. The towel was used to dry naked bodies, the T-shirt is an item of clothing worn next to the body and 'Potato' the sheep was held and cuddled in bed. These ordinary objects which were used to facilitate the love relationships between these partners become more than their material substance (Noble, 2004). Not only through time, but through touch they become '*bundles of meaning and experience, layers of multiple significance*' (Noble, 2004, p.248 emphasis in original) as they become saturated with traces of touch. These objects were elements of how participants enacted to one another that they desired greater emotional closeness. Additionally, the objects helped participants to understand their own feelings.

5.2 Recently Migrated, Emerging and Establishing Relationships

In this section I focus on objects from periods when the relationships were established, not beginning, but some were still in relatively early stages. Some of these couples had recently migrated when the objects became significant. Others had yet to migrate. I analyse how the choice of objects was related to growing commitment in the relationships. Commitment was variously displayed through objects relating to important moments in the couples' time together, through realising and performing shared interests and tastes, and by demonstrating knowledge of their partner's tastes and likes.

An object which represents an important time is the rock which Freddy and Bethany chose. They explained:

Freddy: Yes, this is just a rock from a national park.

Bethany: Just a rock from a national park, and it just shows all the different years.

Freddy: Yes, the park was a very special moment in our ... the beginning of our relationship.

Bethany: It was. It was lovely.



Figure 5.4 A rock which Bethany and Freddy found in Australia.

The rock contains memories of their time in Australia for Bethany and Freddy. It was an important moment for them, which might have been determined in hindsight, but it shows how a patina of meaning builds up over time (Noble, 2004). The layering of meaning and time is reflected in Bethany's comment above when she describes the rock as showing 'different years'. She is referring to geological time in the layers of the rock, but the layering resonates with the temporal nature of the memories the rock holds. They construct a joint narrative around finding the rock which captures their shared spirit of adventure and shows they were becoming more committed to each other. On one level, the rock functions as a 'memory box [...] (Hoskins, 1998, p.5), but equally it evokes emotional, contemplative responses such as reflecting on the layers in the rock and the years they have spent together. Moreover, Noble (2004) says that objects should not be thought of as only mnemonic devices as they accrue importance over time. Part of how we create a sense of a continuous self (Noble, 2004) is through layers of meaning which build over time and personal items can be part of this. Objects which people keep can mark milestones and stages in their lives and their significance can shift and evolve over time. Following Noble, objects should be viewed for how they make and show connections between people, and salient here, how they help to construct 'shared memories of events' (2004, p.243). It also points to a time when they were finding commonalities realising that they both had a similar sense of adventure:

Bethany: The canyons were amazing, weren't they? [...] the only way back was to jump off a cliff, into the water. [...]

Freddy: We wanted to go further, that's why we jumped off the cliff.

Their rock evoked emotional memories for them about how they found they shared a sense of adventure. They mobilise the adventurousness to show shared tastes. Their adventurousness contrasts to the more subdued, settled lifestyle they currently have, showing a continuing collective endeavour of creating a combined couple identity.

Another couple, April and Patrick, chose the doorway where they had their first public kiss as their 'object'. Patrick used the phrase 'Where We Went Public' as the title of the email in which he sent me the photo of the doorway after the interview.



Figure 5.5 The doorway where April and Patrick had their first public kiss.

The doorway contained a momentary act of intimacy between the couple. For them, it is a geographical and emotional place of 'connection, pleasure, desire, love and attachment' (Bondi, Davidson, and Smith, 2005, p.8). The doorway was used for an intimate act by for April and Patrick, but it also has a distinctly public aspect. The performance of the kiss in front of the local community gives it a declarative quality which shows that as April and Patrick move toward each other in both a spatial and emotional sense, they 'close [themselves] to others' (Thien, 2005, p.192). The kiss itself is important as 'gendered bodies press together in the act of a kiss, yet the intimacy on display suggests more than corporeal closeness' (Thien, 2005, p.192). Thus, the doorway, the kiss, the couple, the public become part of an 'assemblage' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988/2003) with a distinct 'socio-spatial character' (Thien, 2005, p.192) which is 'a visual and tactile representation of familiarity, closeness, understanding, relationship' (Thien, 2005, p. 191). The kiss is an example of the kind of heteronormative touching which Morrison describes which included kissing, cuddling, holding hands and sex (2012, p.13). While her research focused on the intimate spaces of the home, the kiss in the doorway was a publicly acceptable form of intimacy allowing them to share a moment of

touch. Distinct from the private moments shared by Morrison's participants, the public nature of the kiss accompanied by the declarative intentions which accompanied it make it more consciously performative. April and Patrick's playful performativity is amplified by the kissing happening in the doorway of a theatre. Their kiss was a 'taken-for-granted' act (Bell, 2009, p.117) as they did not question whether it was socially appropriate, which emphasises the heteronormativity of the space.

The rock and the kiss in the doorway are used as ways of articulating past moments the couple have experienced, but also of showing union (Noble, 2004, p.243) and commitment. They mark a stage in their relationship where it changed for them to a certain union.

We can see collective endeavour also in the work Christine and Dustin do to furnish their home in Brussels. They had been in a relationship for several years. They had both owned their own homes in the UK and spent time between the two so Brussels was the first place they had lived together. They told me about the flat and the furniture,

Christine: Most of our furniture is back in the UK. This is just what came with the flat and a few things, like a few bits and bobs of ours that we bought on various journeys with the car.

Dustin: So, our furniture is still back in the UK. So, the place we've got has been rented out furnished. So yeah, these most uncomfortable sofas are nothing to do with us really. Because literally this is all supplied by the [Organisation] [...] They've got a warehouse full of blooming furniture. I said we could do with another armchair [...] The officious blokey there sort of said "No, you can't do that because you'll be going over scale." There's a scale to the furniture you're allowed in these places. If you have an extra armchair, you go over scale. So, I go "You'd rather have those armchairs in your warehouse than me using it in this flat?" He's like "Rules are rules, guv."

Their accommodation and the furniture provided have a complex relationship to Christine and Dustin individually and as a couple; despite it being accommodation for both, its provision through Dustin's employment give him more ownership. Notwithstanding, he does not seem to identify with it as his. The flat is somewhat 'neutral' as it does not belong to either one of them; once the contract ends, they would both have to leave. And yet, if their relationship ended before the employment contract, Christine's position as Dustin's unmarried

partner would be precarious. The flat provides a space for their relationship which they seemed to want to push against. When they talked about the object they had chosen, they made significant effort to contextualise it in terms of the flat and of Brussels. Christine and Dustin chose a decorative cherry as their object. They explained how the cherry was the first item they bought together when they moved to Brussels:

Christine: We saw it in a shop when we first moved here, and we really liked it but didn't buy it and then it sold out. Then we had to go and search for one.

Dustin: Eventually we found one— hurrah! [...] It's a bit of the antithesis of what we're really like. It's totally frivolous and pointless. Not to say that we're not frivolous and pointless, it sounds very arrogant. You know, who isn't frivolous and pointless?

Christine: Also, we thought it was Belgian as well because it's a bit random.

Dustin: It's very Magritte kind of ... it's got a Magritte links and it's fine and [Brussels] is a very quirky city, it doesn't take itself too seriously. That's one of the things we like about the place. Yeah, we were not ones that much for going out and spending stuff on a whim particularly, so we thought why shouldn't we? So, we did.

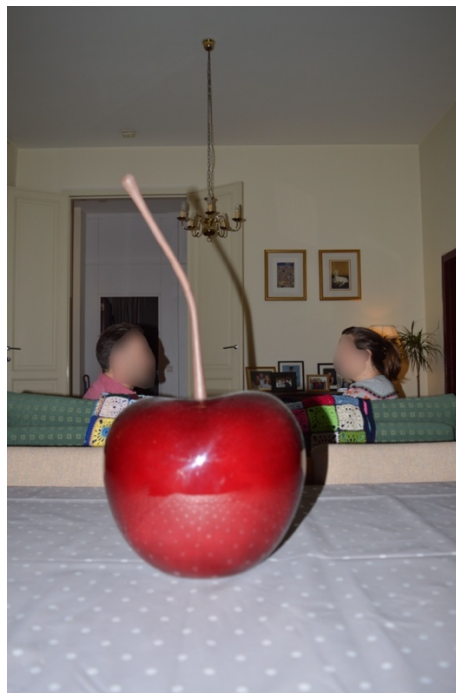


Figure 5.6 A cherry ornament that Dustin and Christine bought together.

The consistent use of the pronoun 'we' in their narrative reinforces their efforts to collaborate. They construct a shared identity around opposition in some sections, such as not being Belgian, not being frivolous and not liking the sponsoring organisation's furniture. The furniture is important in their collective work as the flat is a space which blurs the boundaries of work and home as not only is it provided by Dustin's employer, but its contents are also controlled to some degree by the employer. The cherry seems to reflect 'boundary work' (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 7) done by the couple to distinguish between their couple identity as 'frivolous' or 'quirky' and the strict, rule-abiding and impersonal nature of the organisation and of the flat. Thus, the flat itself seems important as it provides the impersonal backdrop against which the cherry can stand out as theirs in contrast to the furniture which Dustin said was 'nothing to do with us'. In buying the cherry and in choosing it to talk about, they craft an identity which stands out both literally and figuratively against the uniform nature of their flat. For them it 'constitut[es] a key moment in the forging of the [...] bond and a shared taste' (Noble, 2004, p.247). Engaging in homemaking allows them to narrate their identities collaboratively. For couples, furnishing the home 'often [constructs] apparently uniform narratives about the selection of goods' (Reimer and Leslie, 2004, p. 197), which is a way of indicating compatibility (Reimer and Leslie, 2004, p. 199); however this is not always consistent for all homemaking or across the course of a relationship. At a point when the nature of their relationship is brought into focus through migration (Walsh, 2018, p.26), uniting in their home-making choices seemed important. Dustin and Christine seemed to use their shopping as 'an occasion to learn about each other's taste and forge a relationship in terms of shopping compatibility' (Miller, 1998, p.29). It shows how they found a common ground and began to shape their identity as a couple against the backdrop of their military-issued furniture. Dustin's assertion that the cherry is 'frivolous' is also a way of emphasising their distinctiveness which Otnes and Pleck (2003) argue is done 'not only through spending on goods but also by their behaviour through acting nutty or zany' (p.268).

Understanding one's partner's taste can show commitment. Showing commitment through knowing one's partner's tastes was demonstrated by the ruby and gold necklace which Graham had given Mathilde:

Mathilde: First Christmas present! First Christmas present! [...] It really corresponds to the kind of jewellery I like. And he didn't know me so well, what, just six months?

Graham: Yes.

Mathilde: I was quite impressed by the fact that it's exactly my type, the kind of jewellery I like.



Figure 5.7 The necklace Graham gave Mathilde.

The invisible work of noting and paying attention which Graham demonstrates by buying the necklace complement the more overt work of shopping. He said:

Graham: [I bought it] in the UK, actually. Well, I was back in the UK at the time. I always find it, well, I mean, for me, jewellers in the UK are a bit more ... are a bit more accessible; I can go in there and talk to them, whereas at that time, my Spanish wasn't as good. And because I guess I was more familiar with British jewellery and the styles there, I figured I should be able to get what I wanted, and I was really ... I was quite pleased to eventually find it. Although it didn't take me that long, but it was a very intense day going around, looking.

Yvonne: And how did you decide? Because you said you knew exactly; you knew. How had you decided, or what was the ... why did you want to buy her that?

Graham: She had something else that was similar, and I knew I wanted gold because gold compliments her skin. Ruby, as well, is your thing; you've got some of the

Mathilde: Red.

Graham: Red is one of her ... is your favourite colour.

Mathilde: Yes.

Graham: So, it was tricky, yes. And then with the matching earrings, as well, I was like, "Oh, yes!"

Graham's shopping trip which took place in the first six months of their relationship could be seen as 'a specific act of courtship' (Miller, 1998, p.28). His shopping displayed a skill of being able to find the right item of jewellery which would encapsulate and display the knowledge he had gathered about what Mathilde would like. Displaying shopping skills works to show that Graham is caring and considerate. He talks about the 'intense day' he had trying to find the gift and that it was 'tricky' suggesting he also believes it involves a degree of skill that not everyone would possess. Graham's narrative of his shopping experience suggests that he has done something unusual, which is perhaps in line with what other male shoppers might feel as,

they experience their shopping as a deliberate form of positive discrimination for which they expect to obtain (and almost always actually receive) far more credit than would a female who merely shops out of conformity to traditional expectations (Miller, 1998, p.39).

Nonetheless, buying and giving the necklace is a way of both demonstrating knowledge of Mathilde and of showing how their tastes and preferences can align.

These examples taken together show that there is importance given to creating union and togetherness. At the early stages of love migrations, there seemed to be a need to show togetherness. Demonstratively displaying being a couple resonates with what Otnes and Pleck say of weddings which is that 'the couple wants to feel they have been transformed from two single people into a family unit' (Otnes and Pleck, 2003 p.268). Clearly, the commitment is different in these instances, but the need to unite through everyday acts and 'mini ceremonies' such as buying and presenting a gift, choosing objects together and kissing in public (a performative event, the theatricality of which is heightened through its location in the local theatre doorway) speaks to the importance of marking these unions.

5.3 Post-Migration Love Practices

I now analyse objects chosen by couples whose relationships had been established for several years at the time of the interview. I analyse how objects can be part of everyday 'love work' that couples do. The objects chosen also 'contain the labour and love' of the partners (Noble, 2004, p.245) but it appears differently from the shopping, or the demonstrative acts of being adventurous and public affection seen in the previous section. The objects which follow are part of on-going, everyday practices of love and emotional work. The objects were chosen from the post-migration phase, and many remained important in love migrant couples' everyday lives. These objects suggested to me that another way the participants' understood love was through everyday, small acts. They were often important parts of practices which were used by the couples to maintain the relationship and allow partners to show love. As Noble has said, personal possessions,

don't just represent a loved one but bear their presence. They do this because they contain the labour and love of others, because they exist in trajectories of custody, and hence are consanguineous with us (Noble, 2004, p.245).

In the following sections I analyse objects related to communication, then family. Finally, I scrutinise how love is understood as small everyday acts and how objects are an intrinsic part of the often 'invisible work' (Okita, 2001) and 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983) which couples do to maintain practices of everyday love.

5.3.1 Communication

The participant narratives in this section begin with Elsa and George who chose Post-it notes as their object. They used these to leave notes around the house for each other, particularly when one of them was away. The notes are not reminders or functional messages but love notes with endearing messages or phrases on them. They gave an example:

George: I put them in weird places, as well, you know? Like underneath the toilet seat so when Elsa gets up in the morning, she's got to open the toilet seat and it's like,

you know, there'll be a note there –

Elsa: So, number one and number two.

George: Or behind the sugar bowl and, you know. And there was like cheese in the fridge, and I put it like on top of a slice of cheese and I said, you're the love of my life and then I had a 'brackets', that's a very cheesy thing to say. Stupid things like that.

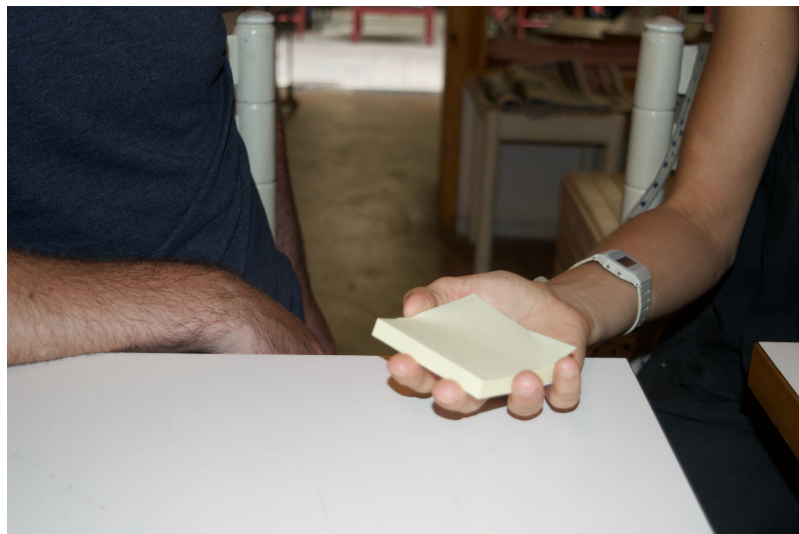


Figure 5.8 The pad of Post-it Notes that Elsa and George wrote love messages on.

They recounted this practice with humour and delight, laughing about it as they did so. One reason they left notes was because they often worked different hours which means they do not see each other very much for several days. They also leave messages in the other's suitcase if one of them goes away. Elsa and George's demonstrative display of love and affection seems to confirm Janet Finch's idea that relationships 'need to be 'displayed' (2007, p.66). George and Elsa are displaying to each other through their Post-it notes. When they talked about it during the interview, they were both a little self-conscious as it is usually something shared only between the two of them. Leaving notes, a practice which is romantic and fun, relates to 'wider systems of meaning' (Morgan, 1996, p.190) as it is easily recognisable as affectionate and loving to other people. These notes are part of their on-going emotional work, and they are important for how they understand love within the context of their relationship.

Talking and listening were the everyday acts encapsulated in the coffee pot chosen by Lalo and Berenice. They said:

Lalo: For me [it] means like the time when we spend talking about something. It's like "let's have a cup of tea or let's have a coffee" and in Chile we have a house with a little garden outside and over time [...] we spend there we are having good conversations [...] I don't want to sound like cliché but our dreams, the different projects that we are involved and always it's surrounded by this thing.

Berenice: I think that both of us loves like working and developing new projects like we have a lot of friends, big family like we are very active I think but I... that's something that like about our relation[ship] that, we need this space of sitting together and speak and spending time in peace and silence and just share, and I appreciate those spaces.



Figure 5.9 The cafetière Lalo and Berenice chose.

Both the above couples are doing small acts of everyday care which is an important way of understanding love.

Another couple, Dawida and Matteo, who we also heard from in Chapter 4, spent a lot of time apart because of work commitments and chose their phones as their object. They said:

Matteo: [The phone is] a tool, an object which allows us to communicate.

Dawida: Or miscommunicate.

Matteo: Or miscommunicate sometimes.

They said 'it's not a nice object' but they chose their phones because they were essential to

their communication. Dawida expressed her need for communication as ‘try[ing] to make lives that are away from each other, kind of, one life’. In their interview they expressed a tension about spending so much time apart as Dawida felt that it was stopping their relationship progressing. She felt that she did more of the work of initiating the communication which was problematic for her. Here, then a lack of union, both in geographical distance and in terms of how often they need to be in contact with each other, suggested tension. Their tension shows the importance of physical proximity in more established relationships.

5.3.2 Family Work

In love migrant lives, everyday emotional work functioned as part of family structures, which included children. For example, the book chosen by Brian and Pam was a self-help book called ‘E-Squared’ which Pam first bought for herself. She found she related to the ideas in the book and would often talk about them with Brian and Chloë, their daughter. She later bought them each a copy.

Brian: The principle that this book espoused is one that we believe in.

Pam: Yes, yeah. I had read the book and I kept hearing Brian and our daughter, Chloë, you know, [...] if they might get a little negative or something doesn’t work out, and I would say something like, “Well, why don’t you E-Square it?” Or else I would come home and say, “You’re never going to believe, I had an E-Squared moment today” [...] And so they would hear me talking about all these different things [...] and so they were quite curious about this book, so I bought them for Christmas, I bought them each their own copy.



Figure 5.10 The book 'E-Squared' chosen by Pam and Brian.

Pam and Brian were a married couple with a daughter, Chloë, who was at university. When I met them, they had recently migrated to Brussels, and they were finding the advice in the book helpful in dealing with the move together. Pam and Brian related to the content of the book, but the physical book also seems important, evidenced by Pam's decision to buy multiple copies. Giving a copy to her daughter was perhaps a practical decision as Chloë had moved away to go to university. Yet, Pam and Brian lived together so it might not have been too difficult to share a copy. While it is unclear exactly how much Brian wanted his own copy, what is clear is that Pam needed to hold on to hers. Having a physical object which contained the ideas and words they found reassuring was important. It seems that the physical book has some emotional value and demonstrates that even mass-produced objects can become imbued with emotion and personal value (Purbrick, 2003; Miller, 2009; Purbrick, 2014, 2025). The book acts like a talisman, the contents of which can be reviewed and drawn upon in moments of need. I remember in the interview Pam continuously drew her fingers over the image on the cover, rubbed the books spine and traced the words on the pages as she read out chosen sentences. Pam seemed to connect with the ideas not just on a practical level, but in an emotional and almost spiritual way, so keeping the words in the material form of the book close at hand was important. Giving copies to her husband and daughter was a way of them all sharing in the emotional intensity and allowed her to perform care work for them both.

Both Pam and Brian explained they try to communicate well with each other which they said is one reason for the stability of their relationship. They explained how their conscious efforts to communicate were evident in their decision-making processes:

Pam: And so that says a lot about our relationship and — first of all, just being positive

— and not dwelling on negatives, and always looking for opportunities and, you know, taking some calculated risks. I mean, we're still ... I mean, I wouldn't say we're risk averse in general, but after we've done a thorough analysis, because we do like to do analysis.

Brian: Analysis and process exploration. We don't analyse like a scientist analyses. We're generally not looking for correlations, we're not looking for weighted average, but we will do stuff. But most of the time, it's the ability to get our arms around the universe and what's our thought process. So, we will do plus/delta T-charts [...] very routinely [...] We could show you the spreadsheets. It's a million T-charts ⁵[...] you put a line like this and then a line down the middle and you just list positives and negatives. Positives and deltas, things you'd want to change.

Pam: It's kind of like your brain dump, if you will. And then you see [...] which is weighted more heavily. Is it more positive? Is it more negative?

Pam and Brian emphasise the considered thinking and planning which they do together. Their narrative accentuates the discussion which goes on between them and the rational approach they take. As Pam and Brian's process involves extensive discourse-based processes, it is an example of 'disclosing intimacy' (Jamieson, 1998). While the above extract highlights the centrality of talking, it also points to the importance of objects in Pam and Brian's 'disclosing intimacy'. The 'T' charts and the physical copies of the book are essential elements. The physicality of these 'T' charts also seems important. Pam described them as a 'brain dump', suggesting a tangible manifestation of her thought process and she talked about how one side of the chart is 'weighted more heavily'. Brian explained that their process of discussion and making decisions together involves 'a million T-charts'. Their narrative gives the impression of a mass of these charts both on paper and as virtual sheets on their computer. They refer to them and seem to enjoy amassing a collection of these charts as a physical manifestation of the work they do together to make sure that each other's feelings and thoughts are heard.

Pam and Brian's processes and their approach to dealing with 'risk' and life were an important part of their relationship. The book, which they chose as their object, and the charts

⁵ The T-charts which Brian described are two columns drawn on a page, with a line across the top to write what is being debated. The layout looks like a capital 'T'. One side is used to write the 'pros', the other the 'cons' of the topic being discussed.

they make point to an 'invisible modality' (Gabb, 2011) of love. That is, a way of loving which might not be recognisable to others. Pam and Brian acknowledge that their processes might be viewed differently by others:

Brian: And we have friends that we love, that are our dearest friends, and their decision-making process or exploration process is so different.

Pam: But it's just interesting, and they may think, if they knew half of the analysis we go through, they might think we're just neurotic. Which we're not. I don't think we're neurotic. But we're very thorough.

For Brian and Pam, making decisions together through a careful process is an important part of their relationship and a way that they show each other their love. Pam and Brian's love work might not be seen as loving by anyone other than the people in the relationship (Gabb, 2011) and is thus an alternative way of displaying love. Gabb has called for researchers to engage with such 'invisible modalities' (2011, p.50), which are ways of showing love that do not involve exuberant demonstration. Pam and Brian's practice could be described as an invisible modality, as it does not involve an articulation of *feelings* for each other and is not a demonstrative display of love. They engage in working through decisions together. Pam and Brian's practice is quite different from Elsa and George who engage very consciously in leaving small articulations of love on Post-It Notes. Pam and Brian might not feel comfortable with such open displays of affection, but their relationship should not be considered as lacking affection. Their practice also highlights how attention to everyday acts is crucial to understanding how love circulates within relationships.

The following example demonstrates how merging and finding similar interests goes beyond the couple to include children. For example, Don and Kirsten talked about their guitar representing a shared family interest,

Don: Yeah, of course. So, we just ... we ... Gustav has not been able to get into a music school. He ... well, we haven't put him into a music school, and now it's too late for him to join, because all the ... music schools start here at seven ... or ... six or something.

Kirsten: And it's kind of our family instrument, because we all three now want to play.

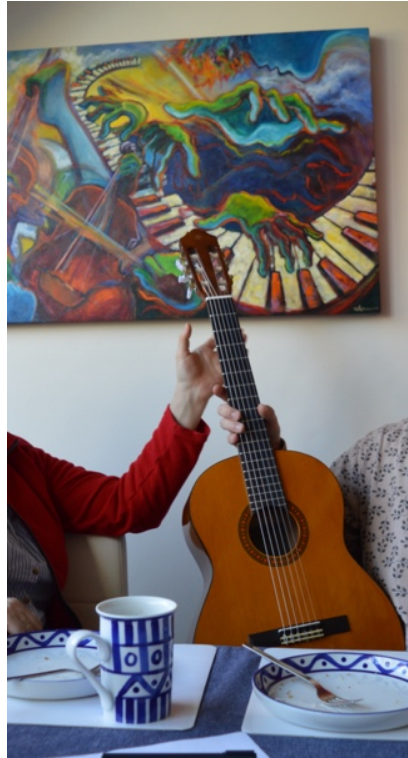


Figure 5.11 Don and Kirsten with their family guitar

They bought the guitar as a way of supplementing their child's schooling, but learning to play it became a family practice. Learning to play the same instrument provides space for them to spend time together and talk about their learning, which is a way of displaying cohesive family routines. Sharing activities as a family is a way of displaying love to their child and to each other. Emotionally supporting their child also represents the shared interest of Don and Kirsten to be 'good' parents.

5.3.3 Emotional Labour

Displaying knowledge of one's partner's tastes, desires and needs is a way of displaying love within the relationship. The next narrative demonstrates the importance both of knowing one's partner and *feeling known* by them. Theo and Jerome are talking about the object they chose which was a painted portrait of the couple. It was a gift from Theo to Jerome:

Theo: For me, anyway, [...] gifts [are] a validation that I've heard you and that I'm going to give you something that you probably wouldn't ask for, you probably forgot

you even said it, but in that moment when I captured it in my mind, it was important to you. And when I present you with this gift, you're going to have on your face this "A-ha!" moment of "You remembered!" For me, [...] a gift is an emotional affirmation of "I've heard you" and it's coming from deep [in] there to connect with you at a different level.

Jerome: Which is very strange because in our household, where I grew up, it was always about, you made lists, and so when you were getting a gift, you'd make a list, and so when we first started dating, I would say, "Well, what do you want? Let's make a list." He was, like, "No, no, you have to know me and know what I want", and it was like, oh, I'm in trouble. I'm in trouble.

Theo: But he'll always say, "You haven't told me". I said, "If you'd listened closely, I've given you clues on this very day alone, earlier today, I've said at least two things."



Figure 5.12 The gift Theo gave Jerome on their 15th anniversary.

Theo had commissioned the painting as a surprise gift for their 15th anniversary. The surprise element seemed particularly important as Theo is clear that lists do not reflect the right way of gift giving for him. Gifts which are not asked for by the recipient have value for Theo. He talks about preferring to choose gifts based on things which have been picked up in conversation. For Theo, attentive listening is a way of indicating that he knows his partner and that his partner knows him. Jerome said that in his family making a list of what you wanted was usual but for Theo making a list was not acceptable. However, while Theo is opposed to list *writing*, he does seem to be making a verbal list. His comment that he has given 'clues' throughout the day shows that he is giving suggestions. The difference here seems to be that the overt action

of writing a list is too explicit. The emotional labour involved in the listening for 'clues' also seems important. If one's partner buys a gift that you have not explicitly asked for, it shows they were paying attention.

Differences in social class and upbringing might lead to distinct approaches to practices surrounding gift giving. In Purbrick's research on wedding presents, some of the correspondents felt that list-making was not appropriate but 'hinting' (2003, p.218) was acceptable because the final decision rested with the giver. Giving the painting as a gift is premised on the idea of knowing Theo and shows how important knowing each other is to Theo; it is important even if it must be maintained through artifice to some degree. As Jamieson has pointed out,

in contemporary Euro-North American culture, it is assumed that intense interaction with a person is required to 'really' know and understand them. 'Really knowing' is privileged knowledge to an inner self only permitted to those who are loved and trusted (1998, p.9)

Theo's comments above show that 'really knowing' is important to him which resonates with the idea that a 'popular contemporary version of intimacy [is] the democratic and mutual disclosures of knowing selves' (Thien, 2005, p.210). The performance of 'knowing' is, in both cases, accessed through material objects. The centrality of objects to knowing reiterates how materiality is important to the idea of disclosing intimacy and to emotional closeness.

Derek and Sonya chose a cookery book which Derek cooks from regularly. The physicality of the book is important as the images and recipes are evocative, allowing Derek and Sonya to enjoy imagining the flavours and tastes which can be prepared. Food is important in their relationship in a broader way both for how it helps them show care and love for each other and to demonstrate cultural capital. They explained,

Derek: I'm quite deeply into food, so I spend a lot of time cooking and uh, this is one of the best cookbooks of all time.

Sonya: Yeah, all of it. Well, basically the whole point is that we both really like food, like all kinds of different food, fresh food, home-cooked food, and we get really both very excited about good food all the time and the other thing is Derek really likes cooking, which German people find terribly funny, that it's the English are the

y'know, "It's the English who cooks!" 'Cuz they're supposed to not be good cooks, or have no good food, um and, and then he really cooks all the time. I can cook, but I never do it. [...] It's always Derek who cooks and it's really nice 'cuz it's restaurant level that I get served every day and that's our favourite cookbook.



Figure 5.13 The cookery book chosen by Sonya and Derek.

The cookery book reflects their shared passion for eating and allowed them to talk about their everyday routines and practices which related to food. The on-going process of Derek preparing food is another way that love is demonstrated. Derek's cooking and how, as Sonya explained, he regularly has dinner ready for her when she gets home from work can also be seen as an 'invisible modalit[y] of love' (Gabb, 2011, p.50). These small acts sometimes go unnoticed even to the family members who benefit from them. Going unremarked does not necessarily mean it is not appreciated or understood as an act of love. Indeed, thoughtful gestures, such as clearing up after eating, or taking the children out to allow the partner some time alone, were seen as important relationship work by participants in Gabb's research (Gabb, 2011). She notes that gender 'surfaces in many ways' through these practices as well as them being 'shaped by class positioning, educational advantage and cultural capital' (p.47).

Notably in my example, Derek's cooking is highly praised by Sonya. Sonya seems to consider it a-typical behaviour because of nationality, as she says both she and her family think it is unusual for an English person to be able to cook. However, while she does not explicitly relate the markedness of Derek's cooking to his gender, through her praise she describes the food he makes as 'restaurant level' which sets it apart from more mundane domestic labour and puts in a male domain. As de Solier points out,

as unpaid domestic labor, cooking is feminized; along with shopping, it constitutes part of the socially expected 'women's work' of food provisioning within the home, an unequal division of labor that has been the focus of feminist critique [...]. As paid professional labor, on the other hand, cooking is masculinised, as the culinary profession— particularly high-end cooking— has historically been dominated by men [...] (2013, p.129).

By describing what he cooks in terms of a male-dominated domain, she is gendering the act, and it may be the gendered nature of the work that makes it remarkable. Derek seems also to suggest it is unusual precisely because it is a highly gendered activity. He told me he learnt to cook 'because my mum was a heavy feminist and she couldn't cook at all, so I started getting into it'. Food provides a nexus through which both Derek and Sonya carry out 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983, p.xvii); Derek works to provide interesting meals that they will enjoy and, as an effusive consumer of her fiancé's cooking, Sonya engages in 'emotional labour' by working to praise him. Derek and Sonya related cooking practice to a shared perspective.

They emphasised how the cookery book fits in with their shared enthusiasm for eating food from different cultures, which Derek says is 'part of our lifestyle' and Sonya commented had been a 'sort of a joint discovery'. Johnson and Lawler's article about love and social class picks up on the importance of food-related practices to point out that lifestyles are situated in specific social spaces and embodied in specific 'types' of people (2005, para. 3.9). Differences in approaches to eating, for example the use of cutlery or certain styles and times of eating, can locate someone in a different social space from oneself. The importance Sonya and Derek give to finding common ground around food practices suggest a real need to find affinity in this aspect of their lives together, echoing the anxieties which Johnson and Lawler identify as pertaining to food and social class in couple relationships.

The emotional resonance food can have for migrants has often been written about in terms of the connections it has with their homeland (Abarca and Colby, 2016; Brown and Paszkiewicz, 2017; Christou and Janta, 2019), for negotiating identity (Liu, Yang and Xue, 2020) and for creating hope (Johnston and Longhurst, 2012). Derek and Sonya engage in food practices which facilitate creating shared tastes in their present and future relationship. The importance of the tactile nature of objects becomes salient again here as cooking and eating are embodied and visceral (Probyn, 2000; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008; Longhurst, Johnston and Ho, 2009; Morrison, 2012). Morrison has demonstrated that food and the space of the kitchen play a significant role in (hetero)sexual intimacy (2012). She argues that cooking

together 'provides a material and emotional space for them to touch physically and emotionally' (2012, p.14) which in her study facilitated sex and sexual touching. For Derek and Sonya the physicality of cooking and eating facilitated and strengthened their emotional connection with each other in an embodied and visceral way.

These examples have given insight into how the objects chosen by love migrant couples are embedded in emotion and visceral contexts in the spaces of their homes (Walsh, 2006b; Morrison, 2012). Taken together they attest to the persistence of the idea that successful relationships are often based on similarity between partners 'often described as best accomplished by two people whose dispositions "'fit together'" (Johnson and Lawler, 2005, para. 1.6). The love migrants in this section seem to base their understanding of their relationships on a similar idea, but as Johnson and Lawler point out,

[d]espite the common belief that compatibility is achieved at a "deep" level, through getting to know (and getting on with) a "soul mate", decisions about acceptable/ unacceptable love partners are often made [...] on the basis of a limited repertoire of "surface" signifiers, such as clothing, hairstyle, ways of eating and drinking, and ways of taking up physical space (2005, para. 1.7).

So, the above examples show how social understandings of love influence these love migrants' relationship practices.

Conclusion

My aim in this chapter has been to bring into view the connections between bodies, material objects, and love, and to scrutinise what this material relationality tells us about mobile couple relationships. By drawing on the non-verbal and tactile ways that emotional closeness develops in couple relationships, I have contributed the idea that 'disclosing intimacy' encompasses not only language-based intimacy, but also the material and embodied world. In the narratives of love migrants, emotional closeness was mediated, negotiated, and felt, through objects belonging to each couple and the emotional attachments and shared meanings given to these objects.

I have argued that the stories told through the towel, toy sheep and T-shirt draw out

how love is experienced as embodied and how material objects are integral to the articulation and understanding of love. Embodied understanding was particularly important at early stages of relationships, when love migrant couples had not yet decided whether (or not) to migrate. In these instances, objects became substitutes for the distant body of their partner and physical closeness to 'bodily' objects facilitated understanding of the participants' emotions. The knowledges of love suffused within these objects speak to the way that love is a way of understanding the world.

Demonstrating increasing commitment to, and shared desires for, the relationship, characterised the emotional materialities of the rock, doorway, cherry ornament and necklace. Love suffuses these objects which participants live with and through and makes manifest the attachments love migrant couples form, both with objects and with others. Section 5.2 thereby demonstrated how emotional closeness is created and enabled materially through these everyday objects which can be stores of love and fondness (Purbrick, 2014).

In the final section, we saw how objects are used in emotional and relationship work. The Post-it notes, cafetière, painting and cookery book, together speak to the emotional work of knowing and continual communication that goes on within love migrant relationships. The narratives demonstrated that 'knowing' one another was integral to understandings of love. This was perhaps most poignantly exhibited in Theo and Jerome's narrative about their gift giving practices, which is testament to how 'intimacy engenders an 'us' that is necessarily proximal and knowing' (Thien, 2005, p.193). Attention to love and intimacy in this chapter, has highlighted the centrality of the material world to emotional lives and has revealed connections between embodied knowledge and understanding one's partner. This focus has shown that practices of creating intimacy are complex and fluid, and not only fostered through verbal disclosure but inextricably entangled with the body and with the material world.

The next chapter builds on the analysis of materiality and embodiment here, to examine how objects are embedded in emergent identities related to social and romantic capital. By examining how love is central to subjectivity, I present further evidence that love is a way of understanding the world as it emerges as a 'mode of being' (Noble, 2004).

Chapter 6. Love Migrant Subjectivities

Introduction

In contemporary western societies, love is often understood as central to individual subjectivity (Faier, 2007, 2009; Langhamer, 2013). Love, loving and being loved have been connected to subjectivity as ways of articulating a modern self (Ahearn, 2003; Faier, 2009), as means through which partners can perform discourses of equity (Giddens, 1992), and as routes to self-fulfilment (Langhamer, 2013). The interpretation of love as related to individual subjectivity is not only spatially, but temporally specific. For example, in pre-war England, couple love had been understood principally as about taking care of one's partner, according to Claire Langhamer, but post-war this shifted to love being about 'understanding them and cultivating their self-development' (2013, p.38). Love, it was thought, could 'transform the self' and countless examples of social scripts offered in popular culture and the media provided 'a continually expanding resource out of which individuals could fashion a sense of themselves in love' (Langhamer, 2013, p.25). In a transnational context, Lieba Faier has demonstrated that Filipina women migrants to rural Japan 'craft lives and selves' through love (2007, p.149) and she shows love and emotion can play a central role in the formation of subjectivities in global flows of people. These literatures have demonstrated that love is key to subjectivity which makes love a productive site to explore emergent subjectivities. The meanings afforded to love are not static, however, and are closely linked to social and economic contexts and change over time (Jackson, 1993; Langhamer, 2013) and across space. Ideas about what love means are influenced by social discourses and shaped and framed by multiple social spheres and media representations.

In this final empirical chapter I draw attention to emergent love migrant subjectivities. Firstly, I scrutinise how love migrant narratives are threaded with narratives of class and distinction. As Illouz has commented, 'the post-modern romantic utopia contains the classless dream of leisure and authenticity at the same time that it affirms new class divisions and class identities' (Illouz, 1997, p.100). I contend that the narratives of 'openness' are part of an articulation of cultural competence which relates to their mobility. I argue that how love migrants understand love and participate in love relationships reflect such aspirations as well as producing and reproducing delineations of culture, politics, class, distinction and difference.

In the second section, I unpack how class and distinction relate to how love migrants, like other middle-class migrants, shop for culture as a way of defining their own position in relation to others. I discuss how love migrant cosmopolitan aspirations are bounded and how they pursue cosmopolitan identity making through association with their partner. Implicit in this concern is the understanding that love and the self are connected (Langhamer, 2013). The self is often understood to be relational which means that our understanding of who we are stems, to some degree, from our interactions with others, the environment and the things within it.

In the third section, I draw on the objects chosen by participants to argue that love migrants articulate a high degree of cultural competence in relation to love and romance which is part of a wider strategy of creating and maintaining social position. The practices of love, like other ideas and social systems, are subject to judgements and valuations. It is therefore possible to have 'cultural competence' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 2) in love. I argue that my participants mobilise discourses of love to articulate a sense of self which is strongly linked to social class and 'utopian' ideas. Through close attention to how the participants narrate their lives in terms of their love relationships, the love migrant emerges as a mode of being which captures feelings of adventure, freedom, distinction and romance.

6.1 'Scammers, whiners [...] and cool international expats': (Un)comfortable Middle-Class Lives

When I interviewed Bethany and Freddy at their home, I spent some time in the kitchen with Bethany preparing and laying out the snacks she had bought from a high-end supermarket: olives, cheese, cured meats, breads and hummus. She fried cubes of paneer which came with oregano; an unusual combination, she observed, but she liked the fusion and missed paneer. Bethany is a British Asian who, as I will discuss, seemed to enjoy displaying and performing the international aspects of her identity. I admired their house, which had been recently renovated, and talked about the renovations with Bethany. They had extended their town house and opened out the downstairs. It had been highly finished with marble worktops and white wooden panels. The array of Apple Mac laptops and monitors seemed entirely fitting in their sleek, modern home. We went out the bespoke, bi-fold patio doors into the garden and waited for Freddy, who had been down to their wine cellar to get a bottle of chilled rosé. They

told me that they felt they had been lucky to be able to buy the house and afford to renovate it. They said:

Freddy: Yes, I could buy the house on one salary.

Bethany: We bought this – we bought this house on one salary.

Freddy: It's a very luxurious life... And then we sort of get ... Did we get stuck in the easy lifestyle? Sometimes we think, especially you – she has problems with the easy life – it's too easy, this lifestyle, and she desires to go back to ... I don't know. And we both have that a little bit, that we want to have ... We're just rock solid now, for, I don't know, about 15 years now, hey? So, I still have the same job – okay, I got a good wage. I get ten weeks holiday in a year, and that's why we can travel as well – it's not easy to give that up. We can go to Europe; we can go wherever.

They explained that they had bought the house and had both their children within four years which had been a big change and had meant some adjustments. Bethany rolled the small pebble they had chosen as their object between her fingers as they talked about how one of the biggest challenges was travelling less than they had before. They now had a more settled, comfortable lifestyle yet it was a comfort which they were uneasy about. They recounted stories of adventure and exciting holidays as they explained that they had found the pebble on one of their trips. Their narrative showed their struggle with the identities they have, or perceive themselves to have, currently with what they might have imagined. They were concerned that particular identities might become 'stuck' (Ahmed, 2004b) to them. They also strove to put distance between themselves and other middle-class people by pointing out that there are people with 'even bigger' houses than theirs and describing their own current situation as temporary. They place distance between non-mobile couples and themselves, seeing mobility as a form of cultural capital and their comments show how 'middle-class whiteness can be experienced as claustrophobic and limiting' (Lapiņa, 2020, p.15).

The stifling nature of the production of the middle-class self has been documented in other types of migration, such as Benson's (2009) research on British migrants to France. She found that British migrants' 'discussions of "others" reflect the extent to which they see themselves and the lifestyles they seek as distinctive' (2009, p.121). Younger generations of professional people who migrate abroad to work are often keen to draw distinctions between themselves and the older generation of expatriate. They prefer to describe themselves 'global'

(Fechter, 2008, p.131) people who engage in international lifestyles. They are often highly mobile, share common experiences of places in the 'Western world' (2008, p.132) and have 'world-wide social networks' (ibid.). While they may not engage with expatriate groups, they create a 'Western international bubble' (2008, p.133) and form, as Fechter points out, 'an emerging class' based on financial capital coupled with cultural capital (ibid.). Their mobility allows them to foster 'global tastes' (2008, p.135) which distinguish them from older generations of 'family expatriates', a boundary which they are keen to emphasise (2008, p.136). Other white Westerners described by Fechter living more modest lifestyles find the older generation of expatriates odd for wanting to 'maintain their little worlds' (2008, p.142) in a foreign country. Notwithstanding, they still benefit from their status as white Westerners because 'the social and cultural differentials provide advantages which may not be available to them in their home countries' (2008, p.143). Thus, while differentiating themselves from 'traditional' expatriates, their experiences are still marked by the same imbalances of power which they are unable to completely transgress.

Bethany and Freddy's narrative shows that they are uncomfortable with their current lifestyle, which could be attributed to 'a sense of being downgraded or a "fear of falling"' (Ehrenreich, 1989) which is sometimes associated with the 'middle-class condition' (Bacqué et al., 2015, p.160). Bethany and Freddy seem to have trepidations about losing some of the capital they gained when they were more mobile and not settled. Indeed, choosing the small rock (see Chapter 5) allowed them to recount the adventure, mobility and freedom they had previously had in their lives. Bethany and Freddy, like other love migrants in this study, see travel and mobility as an important resource in their armoury of cultural capital. Viewing mobility as a social resource resonates strongly with what Bacqué et al. (2015) found in their study of the middle classes in London and Paris where mobility was an important aspect of the lives of upper-middle-class city dwellers. Bacqué et al. found that upper-middle-class residents wanted 'ready access to freely chosen long-distance mobility' (2015, p.84). Lack of access to travel created feelings of 'constraint' in Bacqué et al.'s research which resonates with Bethany and Freddy's narrative.

Similar views were articulated by other couples, for example, Don and Kirsten's narrative shows how important mobility is to them and their relationship:

Don: I think that there are two different types of people. [...] there are those people who absolutely, under no circumstances, will leave their neighbourhood, and those that absolutely will. There are those who won't leave their village, their city, their state, their country ... I actually ... growing up as a child, considered

myself good material for colonisation of the Moon or Mars, right? I don't really ... I'd leave the planet. I really don't care.

Kirsten: We don't really have anything in common with Belgian couples that have been here their entire lives and lived here forever. We don't have anything in common, so it's really hard to connect and make friends. We have maybe one couple that we really like, they're both Belgians, and we met them through school, from Georg, and we still see them. But other than that, I think we're more leaning now towards the international community in Belgium, because we have more in common with them, and we can connect with them better, like [a couple they know], they've been around, so they understand, I think. They kind of have the same mind-set, opposed to ... really, like families that we meet through the school from Georg's that have been here their entire lives, they're just ... just hard to connect with

Here the distinction between mobile and non-mobile people is starkly drawn. Both Don and Kirsten align themselves with an international community which they depict as worldly and unconnected to local places. They view non-mobility as undesirable although they are not specific about exactly why. Don casts his attraction to Kirsten in terms of his ideas about mobility:

Don: I wouldn't have been interested in you [Kirsten] if you were not a worldly person, I think. If you were somebody who was from a tiny little town in Colorado.

Don and Kirsten's comments suggest that one's partner is important to one's own subjectivity; their experiences and cultural capital inform each other's and merge. In previous research on mobility and social capital, mobility is drawn on by interviewees to produce individual subjectivity. What is distinctive to my research is that migration is mobilised in the production of the couple's subjectivity. Thus, one's partner can increase (or decrease) one's own cultural capital. Don's narrative resonates with the idea that other people influence personal capital when he talked about who he prefers to spend time with:

Don: You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with in the world. Do you really want to spend your time with scammers and whiners and people who are there to cheat the system, and just mark time until they die? Or,

do you want to spend time around achievers, and people who are going places and doing the cool things that international expats on the move do?

Don's comment points to how individual subjectivities are inextricably linked to our environments and the people who surround us, although he puts it slightly differently, saying that people 'are the average of the five people you spend the most time with'. He clearly associates mobility with prestige and doing 'the cool things'. Don draws on his connections to others as a way of defining his own selfhood, as though it were a sort of aggregate composed of bits of others. Don's understanding of subjectivity aligns with an embodied, 'relational' self (Conradson and McKay, 2007) which is 'accumulated' (Noble, 2004) from our material environment and interactions with others. His words capture the way that interactions between bodies can become 'sticky' (Ahmed, 2004b) and shape one another. Don's comment sheds light on what he feels can happen if those in our 'constellations' have a negative influence; the 'scammers and whiners'. His comment draws attention to the precarious nature of subjectivity. In relation to love migrant identity, a selfhood which is relational, it might be altered when those in our orbit change, through migration or otherwise. So, to maintain a sense of oneself as mobile and aspirationally cosmopolitan (Amit and Gardiner Barber, 2015), one needs to have similar international, mobile people around. Having an international, worldly partner could then be seen to be important to love migrant subjectivity.

Don and Kirsten seemed to need to be connected to multiple places which was reflected in the materialities of their home; the photo below shows the clocks which they had mounted on the wall of their flat.



Figure 6.1 The five clocks in Don and Kirsten's flat.

Their display of clocks is immediately obvious to anyone who comes into their flat. It serves some practical purpose but is perhaps more about showing their identities as international people. The significance of 'biographical objects' (Hoskins, 1998) is an important theme throughout my thesis and here we can see how these kinds of objects are central to Don and Kirsten's life as a way of 'represent[ing] identification and belonging in relation to the geographies of migration and place' (Walsh, 2011, p.522). The clocks act as 'pivotal domestic objects' (Woodward, 2001) and a 'visual anchor' (Walsh, 2011 p. 523) which connect their current home with places from around the world. Their home-making strategy functions as a way of constructing identity which, as Walsh has discussed, shows how 'rather than being a bounded private space, migrants' domestic spaces are reconfigured by wider migration cultures' (2011, p.523). Their subjectivities are thus constructed partly through their homemaking together which highlights their connectedness (Smart, 2007). Their subjectivities are also, therefore, configured through wider processes of migration.

Another couple who relished their international lifestyle, Max and Louise, managed their relationship between the UK and Canada for 10 years. They enjoyed the travelling which became part of their performances of social status, and they seemed to enjoy the feeling of freedom it gave them. This is reflected in their choice of object, an air miles card, on which they had amassed thousands of air miles. Max had not wanted to permanently migrate to Canada because of caring responsibilities to his parents and Louise had been able to come to the UK for work frequently:

Max: We actually worked it out that [...] we were spending more than half the year together. It was usually about between six and seven months of the year, and there was never really more than about four to six weeks as a single period when we were apart.

Louise: And it seems vaguely, vaguely exciting when you can take these planes all the time and, you know, and sit back and have a drink on the plane and relax and sometimes go in first class. It was okay, wasn't it?

However, once they had their daughter, their perspectives altered:

Louise: Until you have a child its manageable [...] But, you know, when you've got the small critter ...

Max: You changed the rules, [daughter]! [Laughter]

Louise: Yeah, I mean even flying now - you can't just sit back and have a drink [laughter].

Travelling became less enjoyable as it changed from relaxing free time to the demanding task of travelling with a baby. Prior to this, their enjoyment of travel and the considerable flexibility that their jobs afforded them meant that neither one had felt a strong need or desire to migrate.

Slobodin (2019, p.1492) argues that maternal roles are more central than 'gendered familial roles such as husband and wife' to understanding how migration affects identity and Max and Louise's experiences seem to attest to this. Louise says, 'Yeah, it's you who changed the dynamic. You [to baby]!' Max points out that it was the change in roles from 'the Mum and Dad routine as opposed to the just husband and wife routine' which had the biggest impact on their decision to live as a permanent household together. In Louise and Max's narrative, their additional roles of mother and father impacts significantly on decision to migrate so they can live as one household. Their narrative shows how having children can 're-shape' couple relationships as connection is prioritised (McDonnell, 2011, p. 140). Their comments also provide evidence of how migration is linked to people's life stages (e.g. Lulle and King, 2019).

However, for another couple, Magda and Valentine, such life events represented traditional values at odds with their own which influenced their decision to migrate. Distinguishing themselves from people in their home country, Poland, who they presumed to be non-mobile was part of how they articulated their subjectivities:

Valentine: Not everybody is okay living in one place and not everybody's okay in this kind of country with this kind of attitude.

Magda: Not everybody wants to have a baby.

Valentine: Not everybody wants to have a baby blah blah blah blah... or a church wedding.

Magda: Or a church wedding.

Practices of distinction have been explored in research on lifestyle migration. In Oliver and O'Reilly's work some British migrants were shown to distinguish themselves from other British migrants in accordance with what they saw as (in)appropriate class-based behaviours or 'working-class habitus' (Oliver and O'Reilly, 2010, p.56). Other studies have shown that British migrants 'self-consciously [...] avoid mixing with other British migrants in favour of claiming a

more cosmopolitan orientation' (Oliver, 2007) and in these cases, the migrants tried to make friends with local people but were not often successful. Equally, some participants in my study did not try to form friendships with people of the same nationality, preferring in general to mix with many different nationalities and with others who were equally mobile. As Sonya from Germany remarked about living in Brussels, 'I don't go to any German groups here 'cuz I don't see the point', indicating that she was not interested in comparing herself to other Germans. And she pointed out that, in her view, 'the Irish do that [meet up with people of the same nationality] all the time' thus further distinguishing herself from other migrants who, she believes, do congregate according to nationality. There were, however, other love migrant couples who did gravitate toward people who spoke the same language; however, as their first language was English this did not limit them a great deal in terms of the nationalities of the people who they could spend time with, in a diverse city. These couples, such as Pam and Brian and Theo and Jerome, could be categorised as more typical 'expatriates' because of their preference for spending time with people who speak English and because their migration was facilitated through intracompany transfer. The overlap with existing categories of migration shows that love migration is a lens which applies to migrants within and across other categories of migrant, highlighting the analytical usefulness of viewing migration through the lens of love.

In other research on class and migration, it has been shown that British migrants, for example, are highly aware of class position and the behaviours which surround it, actively avoiding other migrants whom they see as from the wrong social class (Oliver and O'Reilly, 2010, pp.59-60). What we can see from these examples is that lifestyle choices are forms of cultural capital which serve to distinguish and delineate along the lines of social class and privilege (Sampaio and King, 2019).

6.2 Another Experience or an Experience of 'an Other'?

Love migrants distinguish themselves from non-mobile people as part of a strategy to (re)produce social status through mobility. The connection between spatial mobility and social mobility (e.g. Fielding, 1995; Savage, 2005; Favell and Recchi, 2011; Bacqué et al., 2015) has been discussed in the context of travel and tourism (e.g. Urry, 1995) and migration and residential choice (e.g. Benson, 2009, 2013a; Sampaio and King, 2019). Such is the importance

of mobility to identity that Urry has argued that 'massive patterns of short-term mobility may be transforming dominant social identities' (1995, p.169) and that familiarity with multiple places underpins much of what could be considered a European identity. Thus, (lack of) access to mobility facilitates movement through or stasis within social class structure.

To some extent, the identities being articulated through love migrant narratives are about an open-minded approach being performed through proximity to other cultures. According to Desforges (2000), the increasing familiarity which Urry discusses means that identities are no longer constructed as oppositional (1995, p.928). Instead, feelings of 'being at home' and 'common notions of citizenship' are mobilised and constructed (p.928). I develop the analysis here to focus on how love migrants narrate their experiences of being mobile and explore how they often elide from being mobile, to being adventurous, flexible, and 'open' to other cultures, which implicitly positions them as tolerant, 'cosmopolitan' people. Migrating is used in many of these narratives as an indicator of worldliness and interest in other cultures, and conversations with love migrants and their partners reveal that they tend to see themselves as international couples. For example, Jesús and Beatriz discussed whether they felt international:

Jesús: I think that's one of the things that maybe link us, that we don't want to stay in the same place forever, we want to discover the world and travel.

Beatriz: For me, personally, I feel more international, like yes I'm from Spain it's my country but like since I was little, my Dad's in the military so we moved around constantly, I spent some time abroad when I was a teenager and all that so like I'm not really so, I've never been really fixed to a place so for me it's really, I've always been more mobile.

Jesús: I feel like we are an international couple like, yes, we've lived in different countries and everything.

These comments suggest the speakers see links between mobility, their love relationship, and being 'international'. Love migrants use their experiences to articulate belonging to a particular, and elite, group (Desforges, 2000). Their allegiance is to an international set of people, who do not want to be limited by national groupings and whose nationality and class position confer a status that allows them to rarely experience the limitations on mobility that other migrants may. They describe themselves in terms of tolerance, flexibility and openness:

Katherine: Like I'm open and flexible and can live in different countries and things like that.

Bob: We enjoy exploration and that's what matters. We enjoy soaking up, getting more experiences...We're enjoying the journey.

Pam: I think us making those kinds of decisions and using those communication skills and the principles in there, taking risks, you know, being open to new experiences, this is all good

Kirsten: I left right away. 21. So I moved to Switzerland, it took me, it was just interesting learning a new language, a new culture, different food, people, and I just soaked that all up, and then after a couple of years, when I got all kind of comfortable, I thought, well, it's time to do something different now, because I want another challenge, I want another culture, want to see another culture, another language, another, another structure and that's why I just kept kind of moving

Don: I'm totally open to whatever comes. [...] I went to graduate school at an international [college] 40% of the students there were international. They have 15 satellite campuses around the world, and so from that perspective, I was exposed to the rest of the world, and a student of global enterprise, not a mom-and-pop, down the street store kind of guy. So, I'm open.

In the above comments, individuals narrate themselves as people who are open-minded and cosmopolitan in outlook. Their sense of their freedom and privilege to choose to live in numerous places in the world is demonstrable. Viewing themselves as so open to new places suggests both cosmopolitan practices and cosmopolitan consciousness (Hannerz, 1996; Werbner, 2006; Padilla et al., 2007; Amit, 2007) and relates to Urry's ideas about what he calls the modern subject. He defines the modern subject as someone who must 'open out' (1995, p.144) to others, and who consumes other cultures.

Decisions to migrate and decisions about love are often key moments in people's lives when questions about their own identity may be brought to the fore (Desforges, 2000). Travel may be initiated at moments in one's life when identity is open to question, such as the breakdown of a relationship, losing a job, or reaching a particular age (Giddens, 1991). Migrating allows people to recast their past life in light of their new experiences, and in the

narratives, migration is mobilised to 'reimagine the self' (Desforges, 2000, p.933). Whether these people saw themselves as open and tolerant, and different from non-mobile people before they migrated or not, their narratives allow them to claim that these facets of their identity were part of what compelled them to make the migration. These characteristics are also attributed to other people 'like them'. People who are 'unlike them' are defined in terms of being non-mobile or local. Take for example Sonya's anxieties about moving to London, where Derek, her partner is from,

Sonya: And what's really weird is we're thinking a little bit of moving to London. Because there might be an opportunity and then suddenly, I don't know, I had that sudden panic a couple of weeks ago going "Oh no, what's gonna happen if we move back to your [emphasised] place, where your old friends are and where you are the local, we've never done this, what's that gonna do to us?" Do we really want to do that?

Throughout her narrative, locality and internationality are themes which recur; Sonya does not want to be part of a local culture, whether that is her own or her partner, Derek's. Sonya's narrative shows that she is concerned about living in her partner's city. Her apprehensiveness is specific to London as she seems 'panicked' about being local anywhere. In Brussels, she speaks French at work and English at home. She relished the international nature of their group of friends:

Sonya: We've been going through our wedding invitation list and I think we have 17 different nations on it and when we have a dinner party here, just the close friends would be German, Irish, Lithuanian, um Portuguese, Belgian, and when you take our close friends who live in other countries at the moment in there comes Hungarian and Italian in to the mix - easily - and that's just a close group of friends. And just thinking to be sitting at a dinner party where everyone's English it's just...

Here, the participants distinguish themselves from non-mobile couples, emphasising their international circle of friends. They are like new-generation expatriates (Fechter and Walsh, 2010, 2012) who tend to be younger and want to live abroad, rather than see it as a hardship. They are less focused on their national communities and see themselves as global. They tend to live in a 'bubble' according to Fechter (2007, p.63) albeit an international one. Indeed, she

discusses how ‘permeability is an integral aspect of expatriates’ spaces, as their housing and social lives are subjected to frequent intrusions, transgressions, and transactions across their boundaries’ (p.38) and problematises ideas about transnational space. As Fechter, drawing on Lakoff and Johnson (1980), has pointed out, focusing specifically on the kind of language participants used reflects their views on other cultures and experiences. Love migrants narrate their lives with an abundance of language which indicates openness, mixing, exploration and interest in an international community. In other words, they mobilise the language of cosmopolitanism as a way of indicating cultural competence.

6.3 Consuming and Performing Foreignness as Markers of Distinction

Many middle-class migrants tend to view themselves as international people (Fechter, 2007; Walsh, 2012; Cranston, 2017) who want to ‘explore, observe, and become knowledgeable about cultures and places they perceive as “foreign”’ (Walsh, 2012, p. 48). An interest in other cultures also seemed to be important to love migrants. Derek and Sonya, for example, talked about the local neighbourhood and were enthusiastic about the diversity which could be found there:

Derek: [The neighbourhood] has got an Arab community and like y’know the people living next door, and like the little veg shop and the y’know like it’s part of our sort of weekly thing that we do, y’know is sort of walk round and try different foods, like y’know you can buy rabbit and lamb and quince and fresh coriander, and you can even get preserved lemons y’know.

Sonya: And it’s so easy [...] we step out [of the flat] and we have like a Belgian beer shop downstairs, on the other side we have a Turkish vegetable shop, up the street we have like Arabic butchers, round the corner there’s a really nice French bakery, there’s a really good Chinese supermarket, there’s the [...] market, that’s fantastic, so we have— whatever cookbook we pull out of the cupboard— we have everything, all ingredients on the doorstep.

Derek and Sonya's comments show them as a couple who go out in their local neighbourhood, shop where other local people would shop and who seem interested in other cultures, positioning themselves at once as international and as 'insiders' with local knowledge. They perform identities as people who engage with and enjoy diversity. John May has suggested that moving to a diverse and multi-cultural place to live can be part of the strategy for distancing oneself from more homogenous cultures and 'an interest in other cultures is thus seen as a central part of [their] cultural capital, allowing [them] to position [themselves] with other members of the liberal classes' (1996, p.62).

Derek and Sonya talked at length during the interview of how they could not afford to live in London, or to buy a house in central Brussels even on two salaries; they therefore had relatively low economic capital to others around them. They also enthuse about having a range of national cuisines available to them so closely. May (1996) has determined that 'for a class with high degrees of cultural capital, but often relatively low amounts of economic capital, food provides a perfect vehicle for the exercise of a strategy of cultural distinction' (p.60). Derek and Sonya engage with diversity through food consumption in ways which fit with May's (1996, p.61) argument that eating food from different cultures can be a way of demonstrating cultural capital and distinguishing oneself. Food shopping (and cooking: see Chapter 5) also allows them to demonstrate their cultural capital as 'foodies' (Simmonds, 1990), who are people who use their knowledge of food as a way of demonstrating sophistication. However, in contrast to the open, adventurous ideas consuming international food seems to embrace, May argues that consumption of 'exotic' food is not indicative of progressive ideas about race and ethnicity but is about distinction; thus 'an interest in other cultures is thus seen as a central part of [one's] cultural capital' (1996, p.62). So, eating food from different cultures can be a way of defining one's own cultural status, but keeping other cultures at arm's length.

More recent work has shown how some migrants are 'taken by diversity' (Lapiņa, 2020, p.8). An appreciation of diversity is seen to indicate worldly views, but the local neighbourhood is seen through a sense of 'white, middle-class life' (Lapiņa, 2020, p.14) where the pursuit of 'authenticity' is about defining oneself rather than understanding others. In the context of seeing diversity through whiteness, it is interesting that Derek also made the following comment:

Derek: Being native English is so, gives you, puts you ahead of the rest of the game, y'know it's really because they are desperate for native English speakers to be in Brussels, 'cuz everyone works in English but it's not real English, y'know [...] So, career wise, y'know people are dying out for native English people. And it's

like all the stereotypes of all the different nations are like really true. Y'know like generally, it's true. Y'know like the Germans are like very organised; they turn up on time, they're not really very funny. And then the French are always a bit arrogant and [...] the Eastern Europeans, y'know like they work really hard, but they have a different way, but then the Italians or the Spanish always turn up late to meetings and like y'know, like with coffee and food the Italians are obsessive and all these stereotypes are all true.

Derek draws upon stereotypes as a way of showing insider knowledge reflecting how 'whiteness seeks to educate itself and gain social skills through exposure to diversity' (Lapina, 2020, p.10). By talking about what he sees as the importance of 'native English speakers', he places himself at the top of the hierarchy of migrants to the area, legitimising his own migration over that of others and distancing himself from other immigrants. Through this part of his narrative, he seemed to position me as an 'insider' as a fellow British person. His repeated use of the phrase 'y'know' seemed to indicate that he was seeking consensus from me and I tried quite hard to keep a neutral expression.

What was further striking about their narrative was how they talked about their own nationalities:

Sonya: Thinking though maybe we're not so different or we don't feel so different because we're both living abroad. We're both foreigners anyways that's maybe the bigger common definition we have is that we're both foreigners here.

Derek: But also, your English is like so perfect that it doesn't y'know--

Sonya: You don't feel it that I'm a foreigner?

Derek: No. [laughs] with her English you see how clear it is? And she hasn't got that really heavy "like German accent, yes?" [doing a stereotypical German accent] and like, [...], she picked it up which is for me is amazing y'know? It's I don't know, I don't how people do it. 'Cuz I just never will, I'm just not good with languages.

Sonya: We are not that different culturally actually, are we? Like you and me?

Derek: Nah, not really. We got exactly the same political interests and pretty much it's very similar.

Sonya: Yeah, no it's more like uh, it's like wearing different clothes or something but on the inside it's pretty much the same.

Sonya aligns them as both in the group 'foreigners' suggesting they share a common perspective because neither one of them is in their native country. Their narrative dissolves the idea of difference further when they agree that there are no cultural differences between them at all. In fact, Derek says that he does not think of Sonya as German. Here there is an ambiguity toward difference as while they seem to enjoy difference in their neighbourhood and the wider environment, within the intimate sphere of their relationship they reduce difference and emphasise sameness.

Like other 'white middle-class residents [who] position themselves as observers, consumers and tourists of diverse lifeworlds' (Lapiņa, 2020, p.4), they engage with diversity in the wider social world as a marker of their own cultural capital. Within the intimate sphere of their relationship, however, they minimise difference and accentuate sameness.

When an appreciation of other cultures is part of a practice of social distinction, it is 'a way of displaying their desire for an "alternative"' (May, 1996, p.63). Indeed, in one of Kirsten's other comments she explained her motivations for wanting to leave the US:

Kirsten: I thought, well, it's time to ... do something different now, because I want another challenge, I want another culture, want to see another culture, another language, another ... other structure ... and that's why I just kept kind of moving.

Here Kirsten shows that moving to another country was part of her desire for 'something different'. Her comments about wanting 'another' culture, language and so on resonate with the desire for 'an Other', as discussed famously by Edward Said in which the other country is not a real place on a map but an imagined Other based on ideas about what is different and 'exotic' (Said, 1978).

Other participants also indicated that some cultures were more 'different' than others. One person remarked, for instance, that taking an English partner to meet the family was much easier than it would have been taking a 'Turkish' or a 'Muslim'. This remark indicates the prejudices the participant and the participant's family might have. Using these two categories

as examples of what might not be acceptable is suggestive of where boundaries might be imagined by the participant. Don, who had talked extensively about being able to live anywhere, said:

Don: In Thailand, you always know you're in a foreign country. I mean, there's no getting around it, it's ... freaking hot, everybody looks different [...] And there's yaks in the street.

His comment suggests where the limits of difference lie for Don, as Thailand seems to be 'outside the desirable spectrum of difference' (Lapiņa, 2020, p.12). His desire to at once consume diversity and perform an international identity, yet to be surrounded by the familiar were indicated when he said 'like here [Brussels] and the US, it's so similar. If you closed your eyes in some parts of the US or some parts ... you could almost forget that you were in a foreign country.' Don's desire to be seen as international has compelled him to migrate to numerous countries, despite his obvious discomfort. Again, Don's need to be 'international' hints at a fragility inherent within, to borrow Lapiņa's phrase, 'the figure of' (2020, p.3) the love migrant as without perpetual migration there is a 'fear of falling' (Bacqué et al. 2015, p.160) common to the middle-classes.

Living in a different country might be seen as an indicator of tolerance and perhaps interest in other cultures. For example, Don described himself as open and international even though at the time he met Kirsten, his wife, Don had never lived outside the U.S. Their travelling, and perhaps their relationship, are part of the open and international identity he sees for himself. Kirsten disagreed with Don's own assessment of his worldliness, though. They said:

Kirsten: You pretend to be the world citizen, and you can't adapt ... here in Belgium, that's what bugs me, that you say ... I am the world citizen, that means you can fit in anywhere in the world.

Don: No it doesn't. It means I can go anywhere, it doesn't mean I fit in.

Kirsten: That, to me, is a world citizen. If you can ... they can put you somewhere, and you can just integrate with the people, you can speak their language, you can adapt to their culture, without ... because a lot of people can't do that.

Their discussion illustrates how being 'international' or being a 'world citizen', as Kirsten calls it, is not open to everyone. Don and Kirsten had wanted to 'fit in' to local Belgian society when they first moved there. In practical terms 'fitting in' was easier for Kirsten as she is Belgian and speaks French, Flemish and English and her adaptability concurs with her ideas about what being a 'world citizen' means. Don reveals some of the privilege he has experienced when he points out that he 'can go anywhere', an entitlement afforded to him by his US passport, but his privilege does not mean he feels that he 'fits in'. For Kirsten, it is precisely the fitting in which is what marks someone out as a 'world citizen', not just mobility to which access is unequally distributed. Despite her language competency and knowledge of Belgian culture (she is a Belgian citizen and grew up there), she still found it difficult to 'fit in' and to socialise with local people because she felt they had little in common.

Because they were both struggling with feeling that they belonged albeit for different reasons, Kirsten said that they had 'decided to be expats' and that they had realised they preferred international friends. Their understanding of expatriate seems to fit most closely with the 'new' type (Fechter and Walsh, 2012) as they look to an international group. Being international has value for Don, reflected in his earlier comment that he would not have been attracted to Kirsten if she had not been 'worldly'. By situating her as 'worldly' rather than Belgian, he detaches her somewhat from her national identity. Despite the apparent proximity to Belgian culture, such as living in a local neighbourhood in Brussels, in a building with local people, they still feel that there is social distance between them and local people, and they emphasise difference by talking about their own competence as international people.

Some aspired to be international but were more reflexive about how their expectations were different from reality. For example, Sarah and Allie said:

Sarah: The neighbours have been a challenge to be honest, because I had expectations of myself to learn French when we first arrived, and I started doing some online stuff. I just haven't had time or energy

Allie: No that's the irony of it; Sarah probably needs it more than I do. But I got ten months French intensive language training before I came here and in my day-to-day interactions don't use it in a working setting, it's such a multilingual environment but it's really easy to get by here with just English.

Sarah and Allie recounted their struggles to practice the 'international' lives which they saw for themselves with a sense of failure. They talked about 'realising' that they were 'expats', which

was not a label they wanted for themselves. Highly skilled migrants sometimes employ the term 'expatriate' because it is seen as 'good' (Cranston, 2017) and preferable to 'immigrant'. Distinguishing between different types of migrant is a practice which can be seen in Bethany's narrative as she distinguished between her own family's migration to the UK and the migration of other nationalities, saying 'we were never seen as guests – we were brought over'. Equally, Derek stratified people in Brussels according to nationality, positioning himself at the top because he is a native English speaker. Both Bethany and Derek distance their own migration from that of 'immigrants', whereas Sarah and Allie did not want to be aligned with 'expatriates'. The category 'expatriate' is sometimes associated with a colonial past (Fechter and Walsh, 2010, p.1190) and because of its associations with whiteness, colonial rule and oppression some migrants distanced themselves from the term expatriate in favour of a more cosmopolitan identity (Leonard, 2010b). Allie and Sarah's narrative shows the desire for an 'international' identity. However, the seemingly less encumbered term 'international' is still an exclusionary term as a site for identity performance. The concept 'cosmopolitan' has been criticised as promoting a free-floating class (Leonard, 2012) and grounded approaches have demonstrated that highly skilled migrants who are extremely mobile are still embedded in cultural and geographical connections. Allie and Sarah desire an 'easy' cosmopolitan mobility, but their own cultural and geographical connections, such as through language, limit the identities available to them.

Allie and Sarah relished the international environment, particularly for the opportunities it could bring for the children. Their sense of resignation and disappointment indicates that their outlook is not supported by their abilities, and as such might not be understood as sufficiently 'authentic' by others. Despite narratives of openness and being international, there are boundaries. Here then, the couples present narratives of 'openness', 'worldliness' and being 'international'. They mobilise discourses of cultural mixing and multi-cultural interaction which gives them access to cultural capital. It also shows how wider social practices 'influence the most intimate aspects of one's life' (Padilla et al., 2007, p. X).

6.4 Subjectivities, Materialities, Love and Romance

In this final section, I connect love migrant elite subjectivities with the objects the couples chose. Material culture has been shown to be connected to identity in the context of

consumerism (Miller, 1987, 1998), home (Marcoux, 2001; Noble, 2004; Walsh, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Gorman-Murray, 2008, 2009), and love (Moran and O'Brien, 2014; Purbrick, 2025). A huge industry exists around the commodification of love, which has been well-documented in scholarly research (Illouz, 1997, 1998) and work on the proliferation of consumer goods which relate to love and romance (Illouz, 1997; Otnes and Pleck, 2003) has shown that the connection between romantic relationships, courtship, dating and consumer goods has increased, particularly in affluent societies (Otnes and Pleck, 2003, pp.10-12). Academic discussion on the materiality of love and romance has connected it to social class and cultural capital; more highly educated people have been shown to be more likely to shun mainstream consumer objects in favour of unique, creative ones (Illouz, 1997, 1998). It is therefore relevant to consider how the objects chosen by couples are connected to their love migrant subjectivities.

Many of the objects love migrant couples in this project chose were mundane, everyday items with little monetary value. Despite the ordinariness of the objects, they were evocative for the couples. I will discuss here how these choices extend the ways that love migrants performed their identities as elites with high cultural capital. I will then discuss the complexities surrounding the notion of taste in relation to the materialities of love and romance. The analysis here complements and builds on the analysis in Chapter 5 which showed how material culture is revealing of how love is practised and performed. I will argue the mundanity, creativity and humour attached to these objects evidences the social positions and aspirations of love migrants. I will show that the objects and the narratives around them reveal the couples' cultural and romantic capital.

In her study, Illouz showed various types of Hallmark cards to people and asked them to choose the most romantic ones. Most of the middle- and upper-middle-class respondents said either none of the cards were romantic, or they chose one which showed an art image. A small number chose humorous cards 'because its humorous message ironically deflates the mass cultural cliches of romantic pathos' (1997, p.253). Illouz emphasises that her higher-class respondents were more concerned with 'authenticity' and that they did not respond positively to cards with copious linguistic expression as they did not want other people's words to speak for them. Gifts and romantic objects which were not associated with conventional meanings of love and which emphasised 'the effort, creativity and originality of the giver' (1997, p.256) tended to have more meaning for upper-middle-class respondents. Illouz argues that the 'most educated classes vehemently asserted their distance from stereotypes of romance' (1997, p.257) and 'they spurn the use of mass-marketed commodities when unmediated by an original "self"' (p.258).

One of the mundane objects is the coffee pot which Jana and Mark chose. They described how they had bought it from a kitchenware shop in Paris. They talked about their shared passion for simplicity and thrift around their coffee:

Jana: What I really like about it is just, it's simple. Everybody talks about, [...] you need to go to great lengths to get the coffee done, and then actually, there you go, this is ... you could just bring it with you, and it lasts forever. You don't have to have papers for filter or anything. You can just come along with this. We've got everything technical when we go walking in the hills, but we bring our coffee, this one, with us. It's just because we both love the coffee.

Mark: [This coffee cost] three and a half quid from Waitrose. If you get into coffee [...] and keep going to places like Monmouth Coffee Shop, and all that kind of thing, buying ten quid a kilo, or ten quid a quarter kilo coffee, [...] it's all a little bit silly. But then, we ended up finding this one at ... finding these beans at Waitrose, and they're spot on; they're just exactly what we like.

The ordinariness of the coffee pot is distinct from consumer objects related to romance which are often kitsch and overtly display love. The coffee pot holds important memories for them, such as their trip to Paris where they bought it, and the camping trips they take it on. But they also embed the coffee pot in a more mundane narrative about simplicity and thrift. They give more narrative time to the prosaic aspects of the coffee pot which allows them to demonstrate their subjectivities and shared interest in being a couple who avoid hype associated with coffee culture and who are savvy shoppers unswayed by advertising or trends. Thrift can be central to kin care (Miller, 1998) and consumption practices both produce and are reproduced by our values and subjectivities.

Family care work is often the domain of the female partner in heterosexual relationships (Miller, 1998), but here Mark is perhaps taking up some of that love work by demonstrating his shopping skills. His obvious satisfaction at finding good coffee at a lower price attests to the excitement of finding a bargain, which Emma Waight has suggested provides for middle-class consumers 'a sanctimonious boost to the ego' (2014, p.160). Her research focuses on second-hand consumption, but Mark and Jana's glee at evading the materialist culture surrounding coffee is similar to what Waight identifies as a 'new form of conspicuous consumption for the middle classes' (p.160) which allows them to accumulate a 'sense of social superiority' (p.160). Mark and Jana's coffee pot differs because it does not

assert an ethical choice, like buying second hand clothing might, but it emphasises that when talking about their relationship and their love they seek to accentuate their disregard for conspicuous consumption and strive to associate their relationship with mundane activities and to distance it from money.

Other objects which resonate with mundanity and ordinariness are the towel chosen by Carlos and Faye, for example (see p. 127 for image), the coffee pot chosen by Lalo and Berenice (see p.144 for image), the mobile phones which Dawida and Matteo chose, and the T-shirt chosen by Agnes and Gabriel (see p.128 for image). These objects show testament to how banal, ordinary objects can be emotionally important and become 'precious' (Purbrick, 2003, p.215) over time.

High monetary value did not seem to be an important factor when the couples chose these objects. In other words, they were not attempting to demonstrate social position by choosing an expensive object; they were demonstrating social position through their competence and knowledge of the practices surrounding romantic love. Indeed, Carol Smart, drawing on Finch and Mason (2000) has reflected that heirlooms 'never had much meaning in the relationship between original owner and the receiver' (Smart, 2007, p.167) and that it is items with less monetary value which 'invoke the person or some event involving that person, thus conjuring up feelings and reminiscences' (ibid.). Choosing such banal, everyday objects as a way of narrating one's experiences of love could also indicate class and status. By choosing objects which are demonstrably not the kind of mass-produced gifts designed to celebrate romance, the couples position themselves as people with a high degree of romantic competence. Their choices reflect their 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1984) and their understanding of social class and related ideas about taste (and distaste). Indeed, the emphasis on being people who are emotional beings and who can find emotional resonance in such mundane objects is itself a way of distancing themselves from other people with less romantic and cultural competence, or to put it another way, 'love— and the practices of affective consumption that surround it— has become a strategy for affective mobility, and a very individually oriented technique for framing oneself as a modern subject' (Padilla et al., 2007, xviii).

These items have, in Kopytoff's terms, been 'singularized' (1986, p.80) to such an extent that they only have value for the owners, and that value is emotional rather than monetary. During everyday life, the couples themselves may not have paid much attention to some of these objects; it is with the prompting of being asked to consider one's possessions that they become salient, but as Miller has remarked with regard to possessions, 'the more we fail to notice them, the more powerful and determinant of us they turn out to be' (2010, p.54).

Thus, the objects are sometimes highly personal and intimate and choosing to talk about them allows the couples to emphasise the importance of their emotional lives and demonstrate that they can articulate their emotional selves. As Illouz has pointed out, when thinking about love, middle- and upper-middle-class people tend to eschew mass-produced consumer objects in favour of more mundane objects (1997, 1998).

There were several objects chosen which were either entirely handmade or which had undergone some form of 'creative manipulation' (Illouz, 1997, p.258). For example, Beatriz and Jesús chose an album they made together.



Figure 6.2 The album Beatriz and Jesús made together.

They explained:

Beatriz: I'm sort of romantic for the non-digital things, yeah, I like to have objects, it's nicer.

Jesús: Yeah, it's like kind of for me it's like something really like I don't know like, specific for us, like you cannot find something similar it's only this.

They bought the album and personalised it by filling it with ephemera and photographs from their relationship. They imagined that they would continue to make albums and overtime create many volumes. Gloria and Pietro also chose to talk about a book they were making together which began as a way of communicating with each other when they were apart and evolved to be a fictional account of their relationship set in an alternate universe. It was a notebook they had purchased and personalised by changing the text on the cover from 'My Red Book' to 'Our Red Book'. The content of these books is entirely unique, individually crafted and creative.

These books ‘allow the story of the relationship to be told in both a material and an immaterial sense’ (Clarke-Salt, 2017a, p.55) thus providing an opportunity to narrate the processes of loving which they practice and show the ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild, 1983) involved. These books are important as ‘active agents’ in the lives of love migrant couples (Clarke-Salt, 2017a, p.56), but here I focus on personalising mass-market commodities as legitimate and authentic romantic expression (Illouz, 1997). Jesús expresses the importance, for him, of having an object which is utterly unique and ‘specific for us’, which also suggests the importance of communicating their autonomy and individuality as a couple. Similarly, Zanthé and Benoit chose the hand-drawn flyer they had made, with Zanthé explaining it was because ‘maybe we want something like hand-drawn also because it kind of shows a little bit of us. Not too much’. These objects relate to the idea that through engaging in making something together, the couple are creating a relation with their partner (Clarke-Salt, 2017a).



Figure 6.3 The flyer made by Zanthé and Benoit.

By choosing such objects, the participants in my study put distance between themselves and other class-based identities. They are asserting their position within a global middle-class which is highly competent in ways of demonstrating that they are people with emotional depth who value quality relationships over comfortable lifestyles, money and conspicuous consumption.

Possessions can be imbued with meaning as part of a relationship (Carsten, 2000) and as they ‘accumulate’ meaning over time (Noble, 2004) they ‘come to embody to a greater or lesser degree elements of the relationship’ (Smart, 2007, p.166). Choosing objects which represent togetherness, rather than for example, a gift from one to the other, is a way of articulating a balance in the relationship. Emphasising equity relates to other studies which

have shown differences in the balance of power in love relationships along class lines. For example, Lillian Rubin (1976) demonstrated that there were stark differences in working- and middle-class experiences of life in general and in romantic and sexual life. These differences centred on communication between spouses, ideologies of power and authority, and division of labour in the household. The middle-class couples tended to aspire to ideologies of egalitarianism, even though they did not always achieve equality in their daily lives.

When the participants did choose something that might be seen as 'romantic' they often made efforts to distance themselves from that idea. The ceramic pigeons chosen by Estella and Felipe might be a 'romantic' object. But they play down any ideas about romance in favour of humour and knowing irony:

Estella: It's actually, yes, it's a funny joke from the beginning of our relationship

She immediately locates them as joke 'romantic' objects and then recounts the humorous moment which gave rise to her making the purchase:

Estella: Yes, the thing was, the first time that we met, he came to me and he told me, well, literally, he said in Spanish ... "You are a hot pigeon." And then I said, "What happens to this guy? What's wrong with him?" and then he told me it's a very sweet way in Dutch to tell to a girl that she very nice, but I was just thinking, what? So I was like, "Strange". But, yes, I found it also funny that he put it on Google, translating this expression in Dutch to Spanish, so still today we call each other sometimes *dovekin*, which is the word [for] pigeon.



Figure 6.4 The pigeons chosen by Estella and Felipe.

Estella pointed out that she had found them in a pound-shop and they laughed at how 'bad' the objects were, both because they were chipped and scratched, but also because they were cheap and kitsch. They used humour in their narrative about the pigeons to reduce the clichéd associations of romance (Illouz, 1997). Mainstream objects within the romantic canon are often mass produced and formed in the shape of banal clichés which have become associated with 'love'. Mass produced items are often considered 'soulless' (Cieraad and Porte, 2006, p.275) and their availability and cheapness add to their undesirability. Kitsch objects are often associated with uncultivated taste and childishness (Cieraad and Porte, 2006) although the history of kitsch has changed over time and is not always consistent across class, cultures or communities. Cieraad and Porte point out that those with the highest cultural capital are more likely to have 'omnivorous' tastes and be comfortable incorporating low-brow items into their aesthetic. Younger generations were shown to appreciate 'funny kitsch' and lower-educated women generally liked kitsch in Cieraad and Porte's study (2006, p. 287). While people from different social groups might not share similar tastes, it also indicates that they might like the same objects but for different reasons; at one end there is an emotional attachment to the style of kitsch, at the other there is an ironic appreciation of kitsch and what it represents, showing 'both ends of the scale of kitsch appreciation' (Cieraad and Porte, 2006, p.288). By its very nature, kitsch is viewed as low-brow from a high-brow position, which means those high up in the hierarchy might be more likely to appreciate kitsch (Miller, 2006).

The objects and practices described in this section are constitutive of love migrant couple relationships. These participants seem aware of the lack of taste these objects and practices might show as they use language such as 'bad' and 'stupid' to describe them, but they are still evocative. Being embedded in a social relation gives these objects meaning (Bourdieu, 1984), which accrues over time (Noble, 2004).

For the couples whose objects were kitsch or romantic objects, the kitschness could be said to lie also in the practices and events surrounding them. It could be argued that romantic competence involves understanding that overtly clichéd romantic objects are not desirable unless they are understood as ironic and funny. The pigeons for example are kitsch in their appearance but so is the act of calling his girlfriend a 'hot pigeon'. It is kitsch because while intended to be endearing the erroneous translation made it humorous. Choosing this moment to remember and cherish could itself be thought of as sentimental and kitsch, but the humour which is narrated into the memory of that moment stops it becoming mawkish. The love notes written on Post-its also combine elements of ordinary, daily life with a sentimental practice and humour. To display their romantic competence, love migrants mediate the sentimentality of these memories and practices which are themselves kitsch. Just like appreciating an object in

an ironic way, the overtly sweet love practices are acceptable because they are mediated through humour and done ironically. Both couples mediated 'romantic' interpretations of their objects by indicating they understood the ironic nature of the objects and laughing at their own story. Their use of humour 'ironically deflate[s] the mass cultural clichés of romantic pathos' (Illouz, 1997, p.253). The objects articulate aspects of the couples' views about love, about who they are and who they are not.

While the two couples discussed here shied away from too romantic or clichéd an interpretation of their objects and practices, using humour to provide distance, they seemed aware of the conventions regarding good and bad taste regarding romance.

As a contrast to the mundane objects, I will now discuss two objects which can be considered more explicitly about romance. Firstly, an object which is demonstratively about romance is a photograph of themselves which Arantxa and Fabian chose. The image referenced several romantic clichés such as Paris, kissing on a bridge and the Eiffel Tower.



Figure 6.5 The photo of Arantxa and Fabian in Paris

Arantxa and Fabian emphasised the romantic nature of how their relationship began. They both stated with relish that it was a 'coup de foudre' or 'love at first sight'. Arantxa highlighted that it was 'a really romantic picture with the Tour Eiffel, you know?', laughing as she did so. They talked about how they had overcome the difficulties of living in different cities and being from different countries, both saying that it was 'really complicated'. Fabian had visited her for what was going to be a weekend in Paris but explained that he 'stayed for two weeks' and they said that they had overcome the potential problems of living in different countries. They asked me to photograph them kissing and embracing while we were doing the interview. Their object is unquestionably 'romantic'. It fits in with their depiction of the passionate impetuous nature

of their relationship. Arantxa said that 'Paris was really helping with this kind of romantic situation', emphasising again the romance and passion involved in their relationship. Paris is consumed as a romantic site by tourists, so the souvenirs are part of that. As such it is a romantic and somewhat kitsch object. Arantxa and Fabian both seemed aware of the romantic and clichéd connotations of the photo which they delighted in.

The second object which can be considered a consumerist love object was a teddy bear holding a heart with 'I love you' printed on it; a mass-produced 'romantic' commodity, which Alina bought in an airport when she was on her way to a conference where she would see Raúl. They talked about how she had purchased several similar teddy bears for him over the years when they were in a relationship but living apart. She bought these bears mostly in airports as she travelled to and from student conferences where they would see each other. Buying such objects could have been quite important for her in ways beyond love and romance; they represented her language competence, her mobility and her relationship and therefore articulated a particular subjectivity. Alina and Raúl had a 'small collection' of bears, which they laughed about, and Raúl said, 'we don't buy these anymore'. No longer buying these bears could be because they no longer lived apart as they had exchanged these bears when they saw each other, or it could be in part because they had 'internalise[d], different culturally specific understandings and indicators' (Lulle and King, 2019, p.153) about the cultural meanings of romantic commodities. Through migration and over time, it is possible that the cultural significance of these bears had shifted from love objects to kitsch objects.

The cuddly sheep, introduced in Chapter 5, is also an object which could be part of the canon of romantic commodities. Originally a thoughtful gift, the mass-produced soft toy became individualised and embedded with meaning over time. A mass-produced object such as the toy sheep accumulating additional meaning draws attention to the fuzziness of distinctions between 'commodities' and emotional objects; it shows how meaning is acquired over time and through relationships between people and objects. The presence of such kitsch objects is indicative of how ideas about social class do not always cross geographic and national boundaries, and that the idea of romance and the consumerist objects associated with it are important in some relationships.

As conspicuous consumption surrounding love continues to increase, it is perhaps significant, then, that there were so few 'romantic' or consumerist objects chosen by the participants in my research. In the context of the practices surrounding romance, Illouz (1997) has argued that advertisers, cultural entrepreneurs, the media and so on have contributed to definitions of love which circulate in global contexts. These models of love 'ultimately depend on the linguistic and cultural capital of people with college education' (1997, p.248). It seems,

then, that the choice of object could relate to displaying what Illouz calls 'romantic competence' (ibid.). As she argues, advertisers, cultural entrepreneurs, and the media have contributed to definitions of love which circulate in global contexts. The objects chosen by love migrants can be understood as an articulation of the couples' romantic competence. Romantic competence differs, according to Illouz, between working-, middle- and upper-middle-class groups. Working-class people, she argues, tended to engage with 'highly conventional symbols of romance (heart-shaped furniture and accessories, love poems)' (1997, p. 252). In contrast, middle- and upper-middle-class people 'consume more culturally legitimate goods' and are 'more likely to reject the idea of romance altogether and praise the category of the "mundane"' (1997, p.251).

The mundane objects chosen by love migrants allow the couples firstly to demonstrate romantic competence and secondly to align themselves with an 'anti-consumerist ethos' (Illouz, 1997, p. 252) when it comes to romance and love which she defines as 'an explicit rejection of goods manufactured expressly for "romance"; an emphasis on originality and creativity; and an emphasis on anti-institutional values such as spontaneity, informality, and authenticity' (p.252). This in turn aligns them with a more cosmopolitan perspective. Ahmed says, 'individuals become aligned with collectives through their identification with an ideal' (2004b, p.124). Participants identify with non-consumerist ideals of love, which are filtered through ideas about consumption and taste. These ideas allow them to portray themselves as part of an international and global middle-class which eschews consumerist ideals and values experiences, emotions, and people more than money and career progression.

Love migrant couples have a high degree of cultural competence in relation to ideas about consumerism and love. Rather than associate their relationships with the kinds of mass-produced gifts designed to celebrate romance, instead they select unique objects, like the pebble or fossil, or handmade objects such as the house hunting flyer or the books. Others chose things which might be considered tacky and made a concerted effort to make clear that they were very aware of the kitsch qualities. In a sense these objects are at once highly emotive for the couples but also serve to distinguish them from other couples. By choosing objects which are first and foremost intimate and emotional, love migrants engage in a project of social distinction.

Conclusion

The main aim of this chapter was to examine and make visible the connections between the subjectivities that love migrants variously articulate and perform, and discourses of loving and migrating for love. By focusing on material and verbal articulations of their identity as love migrants, love emerges as a significant 'mode of being' (Noble, 2004). Bethany and Freddy's, and Don and Kirsten's, narratives, speak to the way mobility plays a central role in their subjectivities as individuals and as couples, with the connections between perceived mobility and cultural capital and between traditional and more progressive values expressed in their respective narratives. Magda and Valentine's narrative suggests they saw leaving their hometown as symbolic of leaving behind certain views about couple love relationships. In this case, they migrated away from a space which they aligned with 'traditional' values about relationships to a diverse city which, in their imaginations, could be understood as a space which facilitated relationship forms more allied to how they wanted to perform their relationship. Analytically viewing love in simplified binaries such as traditional/modern ignores the richness, complexity and diversity involved in multiple and diverse practices of love and I am not arguing that love should be seen in this way. However, it is important to recognise how participants understand and frame love in their own lives.

Highlighting connections which love migrants make between their mobility and their love relationships in terms of their identities, as individuals and as a couple, exposed the inherent contradictions between the ways that love migrants assert agency and freedom in their narratives yet are clearly also subject to societal limitations. Don's articulation of how his feelings for his partner Kirsten were shaped by her 'worldliness,' is revealing of the significance attached to openness and international outlooks through which the couple, and other love migrants, articulate a cosmopolitan citizenship. This is dependent upon the privilege that some of these couples' experience as migrants in terms of their citizenship, education and finance, class, race and citizenship.

Through a focus on the objects participant couples chose, I discussed how the relational nature of subjectivity (Conradson and McKay, 2007) means that the objects are important to the articulation a sense of self. I argued that their choices of objects help us to understand how love was narrated as being about the mundane and privileged emotion over consumerist tropes and romantic clichés. The emphasis on the mundane provides an interesting counterpoint within the love migrant identity as migrating for love is inherently a

romantic act.

The 'anti-consumerist' (Illouz, 1997) perspectives narrated by love migrant couples complement the cosmopolitan ideals articulated in their narratives. I also questioned whether ascribing an international and open perspective to oneself was indicative of progressive attitudes to other cultures as inferred. I showed that while geographical distance can sometimes be confused with social distance (May, 1996, p. 63), here geographical proximity does not equate always to social proximity. Proximity to alike others is important to cosmopolitan aspirations as cosmopolitanism needs interactions which might begin as individual desires but which needs others who share the same views and aspirations (Amit and Gardiner Barber, 2015, p.546). In some of the narratives proximity to otherness might have begun within the sphere of the intimate relationship itself. For example, Don revealed how in his relationships with both other students at university, and later with Kirsten his wife, he saw and embraced difference or 'worldliness'. Some love migrants do seem to practice a grounded, 'vernacular' or 'multi-centred' cosmopolitanism (Werbner, 2006, p. 498) which includes 'elements of self-doubt and reflexive self-distanciation' (Werbner, 2006, p. 497).

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Introduction

Drawing on the narratives of 47 couples, I set out in this thesis to critically analyse love migration and place love at the forefront of the research. In so doing, I proffered a novel conceptual framework for understanding couple migration which puts participants' narratives at the centre.

In this concluding chapter, I draw on the research findings explored in the empirical chapters to respond more directly to my research aims and questions by synthesising the main themes of the thesis. Firstly, I consider love migration as a conceptual framework, discussing its distinctiveness in relation to lifestyle migration, high skilled migration and youth migration. In the second section, I focus on embodied practices, negotiations and the material aspects of love migrant narratives which highlight the spatial, material and embodied aspects of love migration. In the third section, I reflect on how social discourses suffuse love migrant narratives, reflecting their explicit and implicit understandings of the role that love has in their lives. This draws together the different ways that social narratives influence love migrants' understandings of love and shows that love migrants draw on and interpret them in varying ways. Following this, I consider and reflect on the research design and the implications it has had for the thesis findings, with particular attention to the importance of materiality in the research design. I advocate for further use of creative methods which emphasise the material and the embodied. I go on to elucidate the significance of the innovative category of 'love migrant' and highlight the contribution that it makes to migration studies, geography, and interdisciplinary literatures on love and relationships. Finally, I suggest areas for future research.

7.1 Love Migration as an Analytical Lens

Throughout this thesis, my exploration of how love is entangled in couple relationships in mobility has presented examples of how love shapes and is shaped by migration. My main

research aim was to critically engage with and examine 'love migration'. To respond to this, I have presented empirical material throughout the substantive chapters which evidences the unique insight into couple migration that love migration provides, drawing out the emotional aspects of the negotiations, discussions, imaginings, and desires, for, and resulting from, migration. Taking love as the analytical starting point has shown that love migration relationships can be a form of distinction, demonstrating how love circulates in love migration relationships in and through bodies and materialities. My research engaged with existing research on internationally mobile couples and the empirical material presented here presents compelling evidence that foregrounding love provides a more nuanced understanding of their lives. My research contributes to and complicates debates about how heteronormativity influences couple migration. Allowing emotional connections to shed light on how the act of migration can become meaningful, as well as how attention to emotion can show the subtle mechanisms of power, firmly makes the case that there is much to be learnt from using love as analytical lens.

Presenting 'love migration' as a novel category is, I believe, a useful framework, but the relationship between categorising and identity is complex, so in these concluding remarks, I reflect briefly on the political and analytical implications of employing the concepts 'love migrant' and 'love migration'.

The practice of categorising groups of people in the development of academic understanding is widely debated (Scott, 1985; Moncrieffe and Eyben, 2007), including in the interdisciplinary field of migration studies (Croucher, 2009; Huete et al. 2013; Hayes, 2014; Croucher, 2015). The issue can be controversial because categorising condenses the collective identity of groups of people which necessarily leaves out some aspects of their subjectivities, both as individuals and as a group (Sigona, 2003). Categories, therefore, are not neutral instruments of objective description, but active agents in the making of collective identity. They 'create the objective of their action' (Sigona, 2003, p. 70), producing and reproducing ascribed identities. A considered and informed approach to categorising is required in academia, as while categories can unite, they can also exclude (Sigona, 2003, p.70).

However, categories may also facilitate deeper understanding of migration. When grounded in contexts such as economics and gender, they can provide detail as to why people migrate and bring valuable insights to the micro and macro levels of migration. In this thesis, I have shown that the concept love migrant can provide clarity, providing insights into people's decision-making and experiences of migration. Using the category 'love migrant' also draws attention to the uneven power relations which operate within the gendered, heteronormative

frameworks which underpin our intimate lives (Johnson, 2005, Smart, 2007; Bell, 2009; Cronin, 2015; Roseneil et al., 2020).

There may be migrants, however, who, despite fitting the category analytically, do not identify with love migration. At its most seductive, the category 'love migrant' emphasises the romance and passion which can be involved in love migrations, making it a desirable category for some. These same connotations can make it, for others, academic researchers included, frivolous and trivial. This was evidenced by the participant who made it clear that he did not identify with love migration in his life. It should be remembered that not everyone will view their own lives in terms of the significance of love. As I have shown, love migration includes people of different age groups, ethno-nationalities, sexualities, and economic groupings (including students, working-aged people and retired people). Therefore, love migration is a concept which is available to anyone, but identification with the concept should be participant led to maintain love migration's conceptual strength, which comes from it being used within a framework consistent with its methodological foundations (Benson and O'Reilly, 2016). Love migration is distinct from most research on couple migration because it interrogates the relationship and critically examines the role of love in mobile couple relationships, placing the personal motivations of migrants at the centre of understanding.

Establishing that researching love is beneficial, leads to the research question of determining how and to what extent love migrant is a distinct conceptual framework of migration? I explore this here by considering the relationship of love migration to three related categories already used in existing studies of migration: lifestyle migration, skilled migration, and youth migration.

7.1.1 Lifestyle Migration

The empirical material presented in this thesis has shown that the strengths of the category 'love migrant' lie in providing a structure for understanding how love and migration can be connected which relies on migrants' own perceptions of their migration. The emphasis on motivations and processes mean that love migration is similar to the established inductive category 'lifestyle migration' of which Benson and O'Reilly (2016) say,

lifestyle migration is not intended to identify, demarcate and define a particular group of migrants, but rather to provide an analytical framework for understanding some forms of migration and how these feature within identity-making, and moral considerations over how to live (2016, p. 21).

Equally, love migration does not demarcate one group of migrants through demographic categories but focuses on migrants' own motivations and practices to understand their own experiences and shows how these connect with emerging subjectivities.

As an analytical framework through which to view couple mobility, love migration draws the emotional aspects of migrants' lives into focus and provides a structure through which to understand love migrant lives which incorporates the embodied, material and discursive aspects. Benson and O'Reilly point out that lifestyle migration provokes exploration of 'what migration *means* to some migrants in some places' (2016, p.21 emphasis in original) and that it draws attention to lifestyle migration as both freely chosen and a 'form of consumption' which offers a different perspective to research where migration is seen as 'production oriented' (2016, p.22). Similarly, I have demonstrated that love migration is a process which emerges through the relationship, and that the act of migrating (or not) means particular things to love migrant couples.

One criticism of the lifestyle migrant category made by Huete et al. (2013) is that once the motivational reasons for the migration are discounted, it captures such a diversity of experience that its conceptual clarity becomes blurred. They suggest that lifestyle migrant has become a proxy for ethnicities and nationalities (largely privileged and white) because, while it could also be applied to other demographic groups (largely from poorer countries), it is not used to describe those groups. It has also been argued that economic factors should be given more weight when using conceptual frameworks involving motivational factors (Hayes, 2014).

There are limitations to inductively deduced concepts, as Benson and O'Reilly acknowledge (2016, pp.25-26), but this does not undermine their conceptual and intellectual significance. Indeed, Huete et al.'s (2013) argument that the term lifestyle migration 'seems to lack precision' because migrants' own assessments of their motivations are 'subjective' (p.332), rendering 'the lifestyle migration framework [...] inadequate' for qualitative analysis of migration processes, seems at odds with the nature of inductive approaches. It is precisely the inductive perspective which makes lifestyle migration conceptually strong because it allows migrants' own understandings of their migration to come to the forefront of the analysis.

Different perspectives on migration provide answers to different sets of questions even if there are overlaps. As Benson and O'Reilly (2016) have argued, bringing similar concepts into dialogue with each other can clarify their distinctiveness and contribution. Thus, love migration can be thought of as an analytic tool which does not create a 'bounded category' (Benson and O'Reilly, 2016, p. 27) but instead describes a particular feature of that migratory flow. Love migration comes from participants' own identifications and allows us to understand the role that love plays in migration.

For lifestyle migrants, the choice of where to migrate often plays a central role in their migration; it is essential to the imaginaries of what kind of lifestyle could be available to them, making place integral to the forms of identity making in which they can engage. For love migrants, the host country has a different role because it is *narrated* as unimportant by some love migrants. This does not negate that the host city influences love migrant relationships and experiences, and I will discuss this further below. The focus in love migration is on the relationship and the host city is important, to some couples, only in as far as it allows them to be together. This was evidenced in the narratives of Beatriz and Jesús who migrated to a city that knew very little about, also by Gabriel and Agnes who migrated to Brussels even though neither of them particularly liked it, and by Theo and Jerome, as well as Allie and Sarah, who turned down several opportunities to migrate because the proposed destination cities would not recognise or undermined their relationships as same-sex couples. Narrating place as a secondary consideration is related to the relative privilege that some love migrants have and it is a form of identity-making which draws on the importance of love and their couple relationships in their lives above all else.

Many love migrant couples narrated destination as a place which should provide some sort of equitable compromise for them both, for example being a similar distance from their home countries. Factors such as climate and lifestyle become salient when one or both partners have a desire for or aversion to a specific aspect, such as not wanting to live in a cold or rainy climate. Destination also became salient for love migrants in questions of past relationships. Partners sometimes wanted to avoid living in a place where one partner had previously had a significant couple relationship with someone else. I showed that environment, economics and family were given less importance in how they narrated decisions about migration; the couple relationship was prioritised even when it meant financial hardship or living somewhere they did not like. I also drew out the extent to which factors such as economics, lifestyle and environment influenced the migrations which maintained the embodied perspective and demonstrated that such factors do play a role in love migrant decision-making.

7.1.2 Skilled Migration

Most love migrants in this study can be considered to be highly skilled migrants because they are educated to tertiary level (Boucher, 2020) and work in a professional or semi-professional capacity. However, love migrants are also conceptually distinct from highly skilled migrants because they self-identify their motivation for migration as their couple love relationship. Further, love migrants frequently turned down job and career opportunities because they did not fit with their ambitions for their relationship or left existing employment in order to pursue their relationship as their priority. Furthermore, highly skilled couple migration is typically analysed and understood through labour and gender and family frameworks (Pailhé and Solaz, 2008; Grigoleit-Richter, 2017), but these categories are not always the most prevalent in how couples make sense of their lives and narrate their migration. Research on highly skilled migrants has shown that they are looking for more than simply economic gain (Coles and Fechter, 2008; Leonard, 2010a). However, research on highly skilled migrant couples has not tended to interrogate the role of their relationship. Engagement with the daily lives of highly skilled migrants has tended to focus on what happens after the migration and has not focused so directly on emotion, much less so on love.

Some love migrant couples chose to live apart after migration to establish some independence and autonomy, particularly when one partner migrated to the other's home country. Most love migrants saw this as a temporary phase, unlike LAT couples, for example, who choose to live apart. Louise and Max did choose to keep separate dwellings in their respective home countries for many years, even after they were married, travelling between Europe and Canada. They only changed their situation once their child was born as the need for both parents to be co-present with their young child was paramount.

Love migration identifies an under-researched migratory flow and can be useful in further understanding other forms of migration classified in other ways. For example, research on couples in migration has sought to understand gender-related patterns of migration (Erlinghagen, 2021) using statistical research. While using social structures such as gender has provided strong evidence that gender-based patterns of migration are significant, it does not explain why and does not leave room for the inclusion of everyday interactions that are so important to understanding intimate relationships (Kolehmainen and Juvonen, 2018). Further, Erlinghagen (2021) argues for research to include 'the specific roles of love and emotions for understanding decisions of couples' (p.14) because the statistical approach applied in his paper only provides 'a first step' (p.14). This is

testament to the importance of inductive concepts, and in particular, love migration which directly addresses Erlinghagen's call. Love migration gives importance to mundane emotional interactions which are so essential for understanding how power circulates in couple relationships (Kolehmainen and Juvonen, 2018). This perspective can help us to understand not only where inequalities continue, but why they are so pernicious in sites of intimacy, such as couple relationships (Kolehmainen and Juvonen, 2018).

7.1.3. Youth Migration

For the young Spanish migrants in León Himmelstine and King's study, independence gained through migrating was important and often related to earning their own money which allowed them to live how they wanted (2019, p.169). For love migrants, independence was more specifically and explicitly related to allowing them to pursue their relationships in the way they wanted; for example in Diego and Lupita's story, where their migration was in part compelled by the desire to live together as an unmarried couple

Pursuing a committed couple relationship is often considered to be an important life stage and an indicator of a move toward adulthood. Youth migrants and love migrants are therefore distinct because love migrants migrate principally for their relationship. Further, instead of poor employment and economic concerns driving their migrations, love migrants often left good jobs, de-skilled or pursued further education to facilitate their relationship. Love migrants often chose their relationships over economic concerns, even if prioritising the relationship put them in financially precarious situations.

Like youth migrants, love migrants sometimes vacillated between a 'youth' and 'adult' positionality. In their pursuit of love relationships, love migrants sometimes facilitated their migration by returning to or continuing in graduate education so they could travel on a student visa. So, while they were pursuing a committed couple relationship — a move toward 'adulthood' (Lulle and King, 2019) — some became financially dependent again on parents, partner or partner's family, which is often interpreted as a move away from adulthood. Other love migrants who chose the student visa as part of their love migration strategy but who were slightly older and could finance it themselves, enjoyed the freedom of fewer responsibilities which came with being a student again.

As an example, Kathryn, who had savings, joined a master's degree programme so she could travel on a student visa. She remained independent financially and was not subject to the kind of transitions that a younger migrant might be. Further, her higher-than-average age when she enrolled at university positioned her as a 'mature' student. Even though she was more 'adult' in some aspects, she had not yet married or had children and could therefore migrate without the entanglements that parenthood can bring, which aligned her more with some youth migrants. Importantly, she was able to support herself financially which gave her a level of independence not usually associated with pre-adulthood.

Finally, although establishing a relationship and a home together can be seen as part of the transition to adulthood, starting new couple relationships and setting up home can also happen at later stages of life when adulthood has already been achieved. For example, a retired love migrant couple had recently begun their relationship when I interviewed them. Clearly in love and enjoying their relationship, they were certainly youthful, but having already ended their careers, been divorced and with adult children, they would perhaps not fit well in a category determined by youth, no matter how relational. I chose not to impose an age range on the participants as it was important to not to pre-determine who love migrants are.

7.2 Materialities and Spatialities of Love Migration

Understanding love as relational means its spatial qualities can be conceived as running through the practices and processes of everyday experiences of mobility. Walsh reminds us that the spatialities of our intimate lives are co-produced in both private and public life as well as in mobility (2018, p.37) and as Morrison, Johnston and Longhurst (2013, p. 506) point out, '[love] cannot be separated out from spatiality. It is relational and deeply political'. In this section, I draw on the substantive chapters to answer the research question: how are the spatialities of love narrated by migrant couples?

The spatialities of love can be found in the embodied practices, spaces, and materialities of love migration. My research showed that the decision to migrate, or not, represented a meaningful act. For example, this was discussed by Joanna and Bernard, in Chapter 4, most evocatively as being an indication of loving someone 'enough'. Similar in some ways to public performances of commitment to a couple relationship, such as weddings, the act of migration can indicate a commitment to the relationship and to one's partner, evidenced

by, for example, Aoife and Alfredo's (Chapter 4) discussion of splitting up because neither one wanted to migrate. My research has shown, then, that the 'performance' of migrating can function as a public performance of normative love.

Deciding to migrate toward one's partner, as many couples did in this thesis, or together with one's partner, are demonstrative enactments of love which are as powerfully performative of normative understandings of love as weddings might be. Johnston's (2006) work on destination weddings has shown that the connections between nature and love in wedding tourism connects marrying couples to 'natural' understandings of love. The participants in this thesis migrated to superdiverse, international cities which some same-sex couples also positioned as 'liberal', such as Theo and Jerome or Allie and Sarah. While also connected to the ability to be able to work in those cities, the couple's understandings and imaginings about what these cities offer, and their choices to migrate there, suggest connections to progressive ideologies. Similarly, Magda and Valentine narrated their desire to migrate away from the small town where they came from, where they would be expected to get married and have children, to the superdiverse space of London. Diego and Lupita articulated their relief at leaving their home city in Chile to migrate to London, where they could live together as an unmarried couple. Lalo and Berenice discussed wanting to migrate from Chile to London because they did not know anyone and had no family obligations, allowing them to pursue their couple relationship away from family pressure. These stories suggest that migrating toward these cosmopolitan cities is also a move away from what these love migrant couples saw as 'traditional' understandings of love and relationships.

My research also showed how the spatialities of love are embodied in love migrants' everyday lives. Research on migration has shown that returning home to visit is important, suggesting co-presence is intrinsic to migration in multiple ways. Some of this research has shown that physical co-presence and return visits help to alleviate feelings of homesickness (e.g. Baldassar, 2015) and reassure family members who were left that they are still loved, but the focus of the research has connected the need for co-presence to feelings of obligation and duty. My research has demonstrated that co-presence can also be about understanding one's own emotions; this idea emerged quite profoundly in Gabriel's narrative when he said that migrating was, for him, one way of 'knowing' whether he loved Agnes.

The embodied nature of love meant that it also provided a tangible basis for mobility for love migrant couples. Feelings of longing and the desire for physical proximity were strong motivators for many couples in this study. And, for couples who were apart before they could migrate, the physical and embodied nature of love was reflected in material objects. For example the T-shirt, towel and sheep were all objects which had bodily presence in the physical

absence of a partner. The practices of holding, cuddling, and drying the body with these belongings gave the participants feelings of closeness which might have been difficult to voice in everyday life as well as in interviews but allowed them to understand and know their own feelings. This emotional and embodied form of knowing speaks to Thien's discussion of love as an ontology, in which love is understood as a form of emotional knowing where feelings are used to 'make sense' of the world (2011, p. 316). My research has contributed to this discussion by providing empirical examples of how love migrant couples use feelings to understand their own lives and to 'know' whether they love someone (or not) through emotions and bodily knowledge. They 'make sense' of their migrations by attaching meaning to the act of migrating. Migration becomes indicative of the intensity of their desire for and commitment to their partner and the relationship.

These narratives bring to the fore wider debates about the normative associations of physical closeness with emotional closeness and distance with a lack of love (Thien, 2005). While critical approaches to intimacy have questioned this framing of love and intimacy, the love migrants in this study gravitated toward physical presence because of their need for everyday co-presence. Notwithstanding, love migrant couples also engaged in intimate practices at distance with technology; Camilla and Rolf discussed their enjoyment of dinner dates over video calls where eating the same food gave them similar sensory experiences. They used video calling in a 'always on' fashion to approximate co-presence in their everyday lives, allowing their practices 'stretch' love across space. Technology was used to in more spontaneous ways as well, for example by Gloria and Pietro who preferred to text each other throughout the day in 'real time', rather than 'save up' everything they wanted to say for a video call in the evening, creating pressure for the call to go well and excluding them from social engagement with others who were living nearby. However, for Estella and Felipe, the practice of having dinner together over a video call provoked comments from Estella's mother that 'real' relationships did not take place at distance. We see, then, how even as migrants are flexible and adaptive in their relationship practices of love, social norms also inhabit and shape these intimate spatialities. Furthermore, when technology failed it created frustration and anger, emphasising the physical distance rather than diminishing it.

The need for physical co-presence was alleviated sometimes through visits, but as Freya and Dominique's narrative poignantly showed, visits were often fraught with 'emotional contradictions' (Baldassar, 2015 p. 87) where the excitement of the visit was tempered with the pressure to make it special. Such anxiety about not wanting to 'waste' time while together resulted in Freya and Dominique not being able to experience 'ordinary' time together and engage in mundane practices, which as Gabb and Fink have pointed out are valued for 'the

intimate *couple knowledge* which they manifested which really counted' (2015, p.21 emphasis in original). This shared knowledge that everyday practices foster is also created through our material environment; thus objects are part of how that knowledge is accumulated. Their narrative also evocatively depicts the way that time is experienced bodily, with the end of the visit becoming a heavy weight like the bag Dominique was carrying before leaving for the airport.

7.3 Social Discourses and Subjectivity

I argued that attention to social narratives of love can inform us about how love migrants conceptualise and think about love and about how social narratives might influence their migrations. This consideration was captured in the research question: 'How are love migrant couples' understandings and experiences of love migration informed by social discourses of love and heteronormativity?

One way that social narratives of love influenced migrants' understandings of love could be seen in the ways that 'passionate' love and 'companionate' love ebbed and flowed in love migrant narratives (Illouz, 1997). This was evident in Kathryn's narrative when she said her family saw her migration as 'romantic' suggesting that ideals of love based on passion and romance are aspired to. We also saw echoes of this in Moira and Piotr's narrative as he wrote letters to her every day. While their story unfolded over a timeframe in which instant messaging was not available, they narrated the excitement and romance that their migration story involved. Joanna and Bernard's narrative suggests that they saw love as both an indication of love and a trial of love's 'strength' which could act as a transcendent force and overcome difficulties faced through migration, such as loneliness. Their narrative also showed an equivocal position in relation to that idea, though in their case love did not, in fact, overcome the problems Joanna faced and they migrated to Canada, Joanna's home country. Their migration to Canada (which for Joanna was a return migration) reflects their dedication to negotiation based on equity in the relationship, even though gendered norms mean that this is not always possible (Jamieson, 1998). Using love as the focus of the research shows how Joanna and Bernard 'accompany' each other through different stages of their relationship. Hegemonic and heteronormative discourses of love normalise gendered roles within couple relationships which has perhaps given rise to the tendency for the economic 'lead' to be

prioritised as the 'lead' migrant because it echoes normative gender hierarchies. Their narrative shows that concerns for equality in their relationship were the basis for both migrations.

Many love migrants subscribed to contemporary notions of equality within their couple relationships (e.g. Giddens, 1992). Several heterosexual couples based their negotiations about where to migrate, and who would migrate, on finding employment first. Jesús and Beatriz migrated to Slovakia without knowing anything about it as a country, because they 'didn't care where' they were relocating to as long as they could be together. These attempts to find an equal footing for their migrations, rather than prioritising one partner's career over the other, also revealed the extent to which gendered social structures influence the intimate sphere of their lives as it was most frequently the male who partner found employment first. Notwithstanding, equality as a value in their relationships was important and provided a basis on which negotiations took place within their couple love relationships.

Other narratives suggest that a companionate approach to couple love relationships was preferred. In Gabriel's narrative, for example, he talked about his migration as seeming rushed and emphasised the many practical aspects of the migration which had been organised to minimise disruption to both his and Agnes' lives. This suggests that the idea of 'romantic' and impetuous love is seen as unserious and a more companionate ideal of love might be preferred as a basis for relationships.

Love migrant narratives also reflect the idea that relationships involve work. Pam and Brian's narrative is most redolent in how they describe the emotional work which they do in their relationship. The spreadsheets they make and the self-help books which guide and inform them, manifest in a material way the emotional labour of their couple relationship. Other kinds of emotional work are also materialised in objects, such as Lalo and Berenice's coffee pot which represents time carved out from 'normal' life to engage each other in conversation, allowing them to continually co-construct knowledge of each other. As Klein writes of the cigarette, Lalo and Berenice's coffee pot represents 'the idea of suspending the passage of ordinary time' (Klein, 1993, p. 8) allowing them to take a moment out, away from familial obligations, to focus and invest in their relationship. Relationship work was not always done on an equal basis, nor was it always recognised by others outside of the relationship. Don's household contributions were a way of sharing relationship work when he was unable to find employment, but this was seen by Kirsten's family as him not fulfilling his gendered 'responsibilities' to provide for his family.

Many narratives emphasise the importance of social and gender equity in their relationships but love migrant couples' practices still sometimes reproduce the hegemony of

romantic heteronormative discourses (Jamieson, 1998). Using an emotional approach has allowed me to analyse how love migrant couples respond to such inequities in their lives. Attention to how love migrants understand love, shows that equality is an important value to them and this leads to the research question: What can be learnt about love migrant subjectivities from viewing couple migration through a focus on love?

Love migrant narratives often employed motifs of openness and flexibility, related to the ability to live wherever they wanted. Don in particular voiced his beliefs that he was an international citizen, but this view co-existed in his narrative with highly defined boundaries about which places he would live in. Mobility was a central feature in how many love migrants crafted and articulated their subjectivities. Non-mobile couple relationships were variously positioned as not providing a route to 'real' love, for example in Joanna and Bernard's narrative, and as being less adventurous in Bethany and Freddy's narrative.

The love migrant subjectivity also reveals itself as somewhat fragile, as it is an identity which is not always obvious to others. To a certain extent, identifying as a love migrant is a 'statement of lifestyle' (Simmonds, 1990, p.130) which allows love migrants to display their identities as love migrants and perhaps 'to be recognised by other [love migrants] as such' (Simmonds, 1990, p.130). Analyses of love and class suggest that the experience of love is quite distinct across class divides. Working-class people have tended to narrate their lives as 'unconducive to love and romance' (Illouz, 1997, p.270), for example. Other research also suggests working-class people do not position love highly in their lives (e.g. Rubin, 1976). Therefore, while love migration is a concept which could apply to anyone who identifies with it, there might be people who do not wish to claim love migrant subjectivity for themselves. Overall, the love migrant captures feelings of mobility, adventure, transcendence. It embodies tensions as it reveals an ambivalence towards these ideas as well.

7.4 Methods and Research Design

Epistemology has important implications for research design. The framework used in this thesis holds on to the materialities of emotion (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b) and grounds love in the materialities of everyday lives. My perspective and methodology have resisted a disembodied, masculinist and heteronormative approach to love by identifying love as part of an embodied

subjectivity, which has shown that love is embedded in bodies and suffused in ordinary materialities.

The creative methods I used allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences through a material object which drew attention to touch and created a space for non-verbal reflection. This led to the research questions 'How can material methods provoke access to non-verbal and tactile information?' and 'How do couples narrate couple love and relationships through chosen objects?' which I respond to here in considering the ways that these methods allow experiences which are hard to verbalise to be brought into the interview.

Touch became apparent and important when the objects chosen by couples were held close to them throughout the interview, indicating that they were intimate items which they did not want another person to interact with. This emphasises the way that objects allowed the embodied and physical nature of emotions to surface throughout the narratives as touch was also significant in their decisions about migration. As part of the methods, the objects chosen allowed moments of pause and contemplation, 'drifting' (e.g. Debord, 1956/2006). In this way, themes and ideas which were most relevant to the couples could be given more attention. Having material objects which the couples could reflect on, may also have prompted them to use different vocabulary, follow different trains of thought, and to draw on different experiences in explaining to me their lives, feelings, and relationships.

Through these methods, touch and embodiment were brought to the forefront of the research. Using photography to document them allowed them to be captured not only verbally, but also to incorporate the embodied and non-verbal aspects. I drew on these images, as well as the recordings which capture the intonation and timbre of the voices when representing their narratives. Drawing on both audio and visual resources simultaneously allowed me to consider the emotional atmospheres when writing and representing love migrant couples.

My methodological approach addressed the question of how the embodied and unspoken aspects of love might be explored in the research. The co-constructed nature of love means that love is always done through the body. Indeed, as Helen Kara has pointed out, research cannot be carried out without a body even if there is a long tradition of Euro-American researchers aspiring to carry out 'disembodied research' (2020, p. 22). Embodied research, then, seeks to challenge cerebral approaches to bring in the corporeal aspects of life.

The combination of using narrative interviewing and asking couples to choose an object created space for contemplation. I described how this method, like some visual methods which use photography as communicative tools or agentive agents in the interview process, allowed the objects to become an integral part of the narrative process. Interaction with

personal objects, not just representations of objects, enabled the couples and me to interact with the objects during the interview. This allowed the sensory aspect of touch to emerge as important in the analysis. Some of the objects were presented to me to look at and touch. The cookery book, for example, was given to me at various points during the interview with Derek and Sonya, so I could see the images more closely and I was directed to read the long lists of ingredients. At other times, they held the book open on their laps, looking at the pictures and recipes as though it were a photograph album of their life, the recipes clearly prompting memories of meals and gatherings. It was a personal object, which held intimate memories and feelings, but the object itself was not so intimate that I, a person outside of their intimate and social circles, could not interact with it. Other objects were not offered to me to hold. The fluffy sheep was kept closely on Joanna's lap, held tight, for most of the interview. It was shown but not presented to me to touch as they deemed it an object so intimate that it was only for them. Similarly, the towel and the T-shirt were kept close to the participants. Not inviting me to touch these objects suggested to me that the items held an emotional aspect which was too personal for someone outside of that emotional field to interact with. These interactions differ from visual methods as, had the participants brought photographs of the objects, as 'mere' representations, they might not have had such reservations about letting me interact with them. Choosing to use objects allowed me access to this protective aspect which might not have been available through representations.

Gaining access to emotional aspects allowed me to understand how some objects become intimate in ways that others do not. I argued that such methods are useful to access the emotional lives of participants because they allow space for contemplation at the point of interaction between participants and researcher and because they help participants access and draw on non-verbal aspects of their lives. The narrative interview is a relatively free-flowing format by design and provides the necessary contemplative space for non-verbal aspects to surface. A narrative approach to exploring discourses of love and migration allowed migrant couples' lives to be seen from their own perspective and builds on previous geographical research which has called for more space to be given to the emotional aspects of people's lives (Morrison et al., 2013).

7.5 Future Research

Given the centrality of the couple relationship to social life (Jamieson, 1998; Roseneil et al., 2020), more empirical studies on couples in migration are needed. Empirical studies would provide a grounded basis for more complete theories on the processes and practices of love in couple relationships, which extend beyond the institutions of marriage and immigration policies, and place the emotional lives of couples at the centre of the research. In addition, heteronormative assumptions about couples from within the literature need to be questioned, an imperative which could be addressed through an increased focus on love.

Attention to the social discourses surrounding love, coupledness, and romance in relation to migrating couples has exposed in my research how Western societies are organised around heteronormative institutions (Bell, 2009; Kolehmainen and Juvonen, 2018). I argued that much research about heterosexual couple migration provides important information about how their careers and economic situation impact their relationship and mobility but often omits the emotional aspects. Couples' decision-making is, therefore, often framed within economic perspectives which emphasise 'rational' decision making, for example around how to maximise the couples' income. Not only does this contribute to an understanding of the couple which privileges the perspective of them being an economic household unit but, in doing so, it also diminishes the importance of their emotional, intimate relationship based on love. I continued to argue that economic views of couples' migrating are not always the most salient to the couples themselves and that to understand their lives, we need to address how couples view their own migration.

Despite an increasing amount of attention being paid to couples in migration, I suggest more work needs to be focused on understanding love as an important emotion through which these relationships are lived and narrated. Firstly, this would allow critical examination of the assumption that all couples are 'in love'. Secondly, it would provide space for the plurality of love to be investigated more fully. Love has different meanings for different people. Therefore, love's contingent nature needs to be unpacked to challenge heteronormative assumptions about couples. Increased attention to the role of love, emotions and intimacy would provide a more complete understanding of how relations between intimate partners and between people and place are shaped in relation to migration.

Most of the couples in this thesis were of working age, but the smaller number of older couples points to an important area to extend the research. The sexual and romantic lives of older people are seldom given consideration in academic research (although see Lulle and

King, 2016 for an exception), particularly in migration, so this could be a productive area for future research. More sustained research on the intersections of ethnicity, race and class could provide further detail about how love is understood across different migration demographics.

Creative methods benefit the study of love. Creativity in research allows ideas about love and emotions to emerge at the point of interaction between participants and researcher. More attention to developing creative methods could provide productive means for gathering innovative data. Through new methods and approaches, researchers can access ideas that might not be articulated elsewhere, which could allow them to make connections and produce knowledge about social life. Developing new creative methods could inspire original ways to present research data which moves beyond the written word. My methodology allowed for the communication of emotion beyond the verbal; the objects allowed for touch to become part of the communication of meaning, indicating how the materiality of objects can hold emotion allowing them to become more than their material form; the photographs allowed me to reflect on physical interactions after the interview. There is scope for further exploration of creative methodologies in understanding love migration. Morrison's (2012) use of solicited diaries is one example of the kind of method which could extend understanding of love migration as it would add sustained detail about love migrants' experience. Other methods such as participatory mapping (Gabb and Singh, 2015) and embodied methods would all give valuable insights into love migration. Some of the objects presented by participating couples suggest other avenues which could be productive, such as writing joint diaries of their relationships, or creating fictional accounts together.

The high incidence of skilled migrants in this study is most likely related to the research sites (Brussels, Barcelona and London) which attract high numbers of skilled migrants. Being a skilled migrant who chooses to migrate and has high degrees of agency in their migration likely makes space for narratives of love as the main motivation for migration to emerge. Further research is needed to determine the extent to which love migration operates as a concept across less relatively privileged areas of migration. However, it is important to note that as love is experienced differently across social class (e.g. Rubin, 1976; Illouz, 1997; Johnson and Lawler, 2005), love migration as a concept may not appeal to all social groups. Many enjoyed relative freedom from financial constraints, although 'relative privilege may coexist with precarity and vulnerability in ways that absolute understandings of wealth, privilege and affluence might render invisible' (Benson and O'Reilly, 2016, p. 30). Some love migrants in my study faced financial difficulties, which resulted in challenging situations, creating relationships of dependency and debt. Overall, however, many love migrants were perhaps able to

conceptualise their migration in terms of love because they did not think of it as a journey compelled by financial or other needs.

To sum up, in this thesis I have critically examined the diverse ways in which love is understood by migrant couples identifying as love migrants. I have brought love and mobility into dialogue and shown how love migration relationships are constructed, practised and negotiated in mobility. This has demonstrated that direct analysis of love gives a more nuanced understanding of couple migration and has shown that how love is negotiated is a central part of how migration might unfold. Social stories of love inform relationship practices, as they are continually renegotiated and remade through small, everyday acts. Focusing on embodied and material aspects by using participant belongings has shown the importance of materiality in studying love migrants' lives. Therefore, in this thesis I have attempted to give a central place to love, an emotion and concept which has so often been marginalised in research on mobile couples' relationships. I have looked to bring new and significant insight to the study of mobile couples' everyday lives and, importantly, to foreground the voices of love migrants themselves. I have sought to do this in a way which prioritises the embodied nature of love and maps out a new concept of mobility, namely love migration.

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APPENDIX A

Participating couples

The following information relates to couples whose narratives are presented in the text. Each partner's pseudonym, age and occupation are given followed by their marital status, living arrangements and details of any children.

Brussels

- Beatriz (Spanish, 21. Studying) and Jesús (Spanish, 23. Studying)
Unmarried and cohabiting. No children.
- Brian (American, 52. Corporate sector) Pam (American, 60. Financial sector/ made redundant)
Married and cohabiting. One adult child.
- Derek (British, 32. EU commission employee) Sonya (German, 30. Marketing)
Engaged and cohabiting. No children.
- Christine (British, 37. Unemployed/ Health sector management) Dustin (British, 49. International Relations)
Unmarried and cohabiting. No children together. Dustin has adult children from a previous relationship.
- Moira (Irish, 60s. Teacher) Piotr (Belgian, 70s. Retired teacher)
Married and cohabiting. Two adult children
- April (Belgian, 60s. Retired) Patrick (British, 60s. Retired teacher)
Unmarried and cohabiting. No children together. Patrick has children from a previous relationship.
- Don (American, 48. Corporate sector/unemployed) Kirsten (Belgian, 48. Physiotherapist)
Married and cohabiting. One school-age child.
- Dawida (Polish, 26. EU commission employee) Matteo (Italian, 27. Engineer)
Unmarried and living apart. No children
- Fabian (French, 20s. Employment not given) Arantxa (Spanish, 20s. Marketing)
Unmarried and cohabiting. No children.
- Estella (Spanish, 22. Marketing) Felipe (Belgian, 22. Employment not given)
Unmarried and cohabiting. No children.
- Jerome (American, 41. Corporate sector) Theo (American, 51. Retired flight crew)
Unmarried and cohabiting. No children

- Freddy (Belgian, 40. Technician) Bethany (British, 39. Social worker)
Married and cohabiting. Two school-age children
- Joanna (Canadian, 24. Teacher) Bernard (Belgian, 24. Marketing)
Married and cohabiting. No children
- Allie (Australian, 35. Academic researcher) Sarah (Australian, 35. International Relations)
Married and cohabiting. One pre-school-age child. Sarah has two school-age children from a previous relationship who live with them.
- Agnes (French, 22. Researcher) Gabriel (Spanish, 27. IT sector)
Unmarried and cohabiting. No children.
- Raúl (Belgian, 23. Engineer) Alina (Romanian, 24. Engineer)
Married and cohabiting. No children
- Carlos (Chilean, 22. Unemployed) Faye (Dutch Belgian, 20. Student)
Unmarried and cohabiting. No children.

Barcelona

- Rolf (Swedish, 27. Student) Camilla (American, 29. Corporate sector).
Unmarried. Living apart. No children.
- Aoife (Irish, 40. Corporate sector) Alfredo (Spanish, 36. IT sector).
Married and cohabiting. No children.
- Elsa (Spanish, 30s. Teacher) George (Irish, 40. Teacher)
Unmarried and cohabiting. No children.
- Graham (British, 38. IT sector) Mathilde (French, 41. Lawyer/unemployed)
Unmarried and cohabiting. No children
- Mariano (Spanish, 48. Receptionist) Leon (Belgian, 66. Retired university lecturer)
Unmarried and cohabiting. No children together. Leon has two children from a previous relationship.
- Benoit (Swiss, 30. Artist) Zanthé (Puerto Rican, 26. Artist)
Unmarried and cohabiting. No children.
- Gloria (Spanish, 25. Teacher) Pietro (French, 25. Researcher)
Unmarried and cohabiting.
- Katherine (Australian, 33. Marketing/Studying) Juan (Spanish, 42. Lawyer).
Unmarried and living apart. No children together. Juan has one child from a previous relationship.

London

- Diego (Chilean, 31. Lawyer/ Studying) Lupita (Chilean, 30. Advertising/ Studying)
Unmarried cohabiting. No children.
- Lalo (Chilean, 32. Lawyer/ Studying) Berenice (Chilean, 26. Teacher/ Studying) Married
and cohabiting. One pre-school age child.
- Magda (Polish, 30s. Publishing) Valentine (Polish, 30s. Translator)
Unmarried cohabiting. No children.
- Freya (British, 29. Publishing) Dominique (French, 40. Science researcher) Unmarried
cohabiting. No children.
- Jana (Czech, 36. Designer) Mark (British, 43. IT sector)
Cohabiting. One pre-school-age child.
- Louise (Canadian, 42. Academic sector) Max (British, 41. Human Resources)
Cohabiting and not married. One pre-school-age child.

APPENDIX B

The Love Migration Project

Did you move for love? Did someone move for you? Did it work out?



The Love Migration Project is looking for couples to tell their stories of love migration.

www.lovemigration.com

A flyer made to publicise the project

APPENDIX C



University of Sussex

The Love Migration Project

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study. So that you can decide whether or not to take part, please read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

The research is about love, migration, relationships, living apart from your partner, meeting someone from a different country, moving abroad, settling. Essentially, it is about love and migration. Many people migrate because they fall in love. The aim of this research is to talk to couples about their experiences of migration and love. This includes learning about people in all forms of love relationship.

Why have I been invited to participate?

The research focuses on people who have migrated for love. As you or your partner has done this, you fit the profile for this study.

What do I/ we have to do?

Just tell your story.

The interviews will consist of you and your partner, and the researcher. The researcher will first ask you for some biographical information such as your date of birth, occupation, and nationality. You and your partner will then be asked to talk about an object which is significant to your relationship. The interview will take place at a time and place convenient for you both. It will be recorded with an audio recorder and transcribed.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form.

You will be asked to review and sign a consent form which lists your rights as participants and to answer any other questions you may have before we begin. You may also request a copy of the consent form in advance of the interview.

How long will it take?

The interview will last about 60 minutes.

What are the possible benefits and drawbacks of taking part?

The main disadvantage for you and your partner will be the time involved. However, your input is extremely valuable to understanding in detail the experiences of people in similar situations to you.

Can I change my mind about participation?

Your contribution is hugely valuable. However, if you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What happens to the audio files and written transcripts?

You will be assigned a participant ID number so your contact details will never be kept with the audio or transcript files.

All the files will be kept in a password-protected, encrypted file on a password-protected computer. Files will not be sent by e-mail, only by secure internet transfer.

Transcribers, should they be used, will be required to sign documentation binding them legally to protecting your anonymity. During the transcription process all direct identifiers (names, addresses, employment, streets etc.) and indirect identifiers (workplace, organisations etc.) will be removed or changed. Any other researchers who use the data must comply with strict regulations about accessing data for research and protecting participant confidentiality.

The findings of this research will be written up as part of my PhD in Human Geography at the University of Sussex and may later be published. These works may include quotations from your interviews and from the recorded conversations. I ask that you assign copyright to the researcher to facilitate the use of your words in publications. They may also be used for teaching and research training.

Who has approved this study?

The research has been approved by the School of Global Studies ethical review process. If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, you should contact Dr. Katie Walsh by e-mail at Katie.walsh@sussex.ac.uk, the student's supervisor, in the first instance.

How do I find out more or become a participant in this study?

Just contact the researcher, Yvonne Clarke-Salt, by e-mail at thelovemigrationproject@gmail.com

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet.

APPENDIX D

The Love Migration Project: Consent Form

Thanks for taking part in the Love Migration Project. This is research carried out by Yvonne Clarke-Salt, Doctoral researcher at the University of Sussex.

Please read the information below and, if you agree, sign and print your name at the bottom. If you have any questions or if something is unclear, please ask.

- I have had the project explained to me and I have read and understood the Information Sheet about Understanding Love Migration, a copy of which I may keep for records.
- I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:
 - Be interviewed by the researcher
 - Allow the interview to be photographed and audio taped
 - Make myself available for a further interview should that be required
 - Record a conversation between me and my partner
 - Allow the objects I/we have chosen to be photographed
- I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that I disclose will lead to the identification of any individual in the reports on the project, either by the researcher or by any other party.
- I understand that I have given my approval for the name of my city to be used in the final report of the project, and in further publications.
- I consent to the use of the photographs of objects and of extracts of the interviews in publications, written and audio.
- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- I agree that the information provided can be used in further research projects which have research governance approval as long as my name and contact information is removed before it is passed on.
- I assign the copyright of my contribution to Yvonne Clarke-Salt, so that my words may be quoted in her PhD thesis and subsequent research publications, reports, web pages, and other outputs.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.
- I confirm that I have freely agreed to take part in this research project conducted by Yvonne Clarke-Salt as part of her PhD research at the University of Sussex. I understand what is involved and I agree to the use of the findings as described above. I understand the material is protected by a code of professional ethics.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Thank you

For more information visit www.lovemigrationproject.com