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Love and Migration: a Simmelian approach

Abstract. This text proposes a reflection on relationships of love in today's society from a Simmelian perspective, with a focus on a specific phenomenon: migration for love. Since the 1990s love-motivated migration has emerged in the discussion of the growing importance of social networks and new technologies. Using this social phenomenon that links love and migration as a starting point, the aim is to discuss its relation to some Simmelian concepts such as bonding, cohesion and sociability. This work highlights that migration for love is a typical example of a modern society in which individuals have had to seek new ways to relate and to love, which in turn affect living as a couple and building sentimental projects.

Introduction

“Marriage migration” or “love migration” refers to a migration process in which the spouse or partner of a migrant is a national or long-term resident of a certain country (Wray, 2011). This relationship is the basis for entry rights for the migrant. Restrictive migration policies regarding love affect not only migrant spouses, but also, in some cases, the native citizen spouse, whose freedom of choice in family life is directly threatened. The anthropologist Jordi Roca (2012), a pioneer in the study of migration for love, points out that it is a phenomenon that has been growing since the 1990s in the context of the emergence of a new world order characterized by the growing importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

This paper stems from an ethnographic research conducted between 2015 and 2019 on the case of Mexican women who migrated to Italy for love. According to the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (2016) there are 4,126 Mexicans registered as residents in Italy, of which more than 70% were women; most of these women had come to Italy for love. Throughout 2017, 50 in-depth interviews were conducted in the regions of Italy with the highest incidence of marriages between Mexican women and Italian citizens: Lazio, Sardegna, Sicily, Liguria, Lombardy, Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Piedmont and Campania. It is important to point out that the names of the interviewees, as well as their place of residence and age will be changed and/or omitted for ethical and privacy reasons.

This case study places us in front of the complexity and diversity of migratory situations, since they represent the existence of motivations that transcend the model that attributes a purely economic causality to migration. Love, family and emancipation are, among others, some of the reasons explaining why Mexican migrants for love decided to migrate in Italy. The fieldwork reflected some singularities of sociological interest that are discussed in the following sections. Simmel's theory of love could provide an innovative interpretation of a sociologically interesting phenomenon.

The text begins with a brief overview of some of the classic sociological texts that have dealt with love to show how the relationship between love and sociology is and has been current since Simmel. Subsequently, fragments of some of the interviews conducted during the ethnographic research are presented to analyze how the search for love can be analyzed from a Simmelian perspective. Subsequently, I use some elements of relational sociology as a tool useful to explain the phenomenon of love migration. Finally, the last two sections of the text explore identity and belonging through the love relationship, which takes some notes from Simmel's famous text *Fragmente aus einer Philosophie der Liebe*.

Why should love interest sociology?

In the 1986 book *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy* written by one of the greatest contemporary social theorists, Niklas Luhmann, aimed primarily to develop a conceptual vocabulary flexible enough to capture what he considers the “structural characteristics” of society as it developed after the 18th century. A society, according to Luhmann, is an organization of human beings in which individuals can determine their own sense of self rather than having it predetermined by a strict hierarchy, as was often the case in the past. In this sense, it could be said that a key element in the modern sense of individuality is the concept of love, marriage, and affective relationships. In his text, Luhmann recalls a time when love and passion took place exclusively outside of marriage and seeks to demonstrate how in social mores and literature, a language and code of conduct was developed so that notions of love and intimacy could become essential components in married life as well. Eventually marriage, love and passion would merge into a singular concept. This transition, while giving a sense of freedom, forced individuals to seek total satisfaction of all relationship needs, emotional, affective, and social, in a partner. This intimacy, established by a social organization that dictated a mantra of “home is the where the heart is” (or at least should be), was the basis of a society of the individual and the foundation of the structure of modern life. The burgeoning concept of modern romantic love, in which the individual apparently had the freedom to choose who to fall in love with, categorized love as unfathomable and mysterious. The love relationship seems to simply happen as if by magic. However, according to Luhmann’s thought, the individual loves and suffers according to cultural imperatives. This assertion was affirmed by Pierre Bourdieu by using the concept of *habitus*¹.

¹ The editors of an introduction to Bourdieu (Harker et al., 1990, p.10) assert that “one’s place and one’s habitus form the basis of friendship, love and other personal relationships” Cf. Harker, R.K., Mahar, C. & Wilkes, C. (Eds) (1990) *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu*. London: Macmillan.

Luhmann's main concern was developing a semantics for passionate love through extensive references to literary texts of the modern era; he is original and provocative as he questions the nature of marriage and sexuality through the lens of modernity.

Later, in 1992, the English sociologist Anthony Giddens became interested in another aspect linked to love: sexuality and the intimate sphere. The sexual revolution: it is undoubtedly an evocative term, but what meaning can it be assigned today? Giddens responds to this question in his book *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, interrogating many of the dominant understandings of sexuality in modern society. Giddens sees changes in individual sexuality as intrinsic to the development of modern societies as a whole, playing a role in the general characteristics of that development. For Giddens, sexuality is an invention of modernity, a terrain in which the contradictory tendencies of modern social life are fully developed. Emancipation/oppression, opportunity/risk, all part of a schizophrenic mix that links the life of the individual to the process of globalization. Intimacy, says Giddens, has been and will continue to be transformed.

In 2003 the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman wrote one of the most famous texts on love, *Liquid Love: On the Fragility of Human Bonds*. Within the framework of a modernity that Bauman defines as liquid, the way individuals relate to each other has entered the logic of the capitalist system, an idea that Eva Illouz (2009) would later take up in her studies on love and consumer practices. In a consumer society such as the one we live in today, interpersonal relationships are constituted in the image and likeness of the relationships established between consumers and consumer objects; the individual is simultaneously the promoter of the product and in turn, is the product that it promotes, meaning the labor force must always be in optimal conditions to attract the gaze of potential “buyers” (Bauman, 2007). In consumer society, individuals are simultaneously agents and entities of consumption. Bauman (2007) refers to the neoliberal model that permeates liquid modernity,

affirming that consumerism is the social agreement that results from the reconversion of human desires and/or longings into the main driving force and operations of society. Desire and longing, for Bauman, are characteristics of liquid modernity, based on the search for the immediate satisfaction of these needs.

Apart from the aforementioned scholars, there have been several interested parties in the social sciences who have studied and continue to study and analyze love: Ulrich Beck (1995) who dealt with love at a distance, bell hooks (2000) who explored new visions of love, and Ann Swidler (2001) who studied love and its relationship to popular culture. These are just a few of the many researchers who have sought to offer a sociological analysis of love. However, the first to dedicate a sociological text to the subject of love is the German scholar Georg Simmel who, with his work *Fragment über die Liebe*², became a pioneer in vindicating the role played by affective relationships in modern society.

Simmel places love within the field of affections and decides uses the terms *emotion*, *feeling* and *affection* interchangeably. The German sociologist emphasizes the importance that love has (and has had) in the construction of society (Seebach, 2017) through the creation of loving social relationships ranging from the couple to friendship. Even other emotions around love such as jealousy, for example, either create social relations as a driver or determine them as a result. However, Simmel considers that, in modernity, love is often confused with sexual instinct and insists that the love relationship must be a process that necessarily transforms the social actors involved. The beloved is then determined by love itself, that is, they acquire meaning and significance as an object of *love* and not only as an object of *desire*. The beloved did not exist before and their existence is consolidated by the other (Simmel, 1985 [1921]). Love shapes and represents the individual in a different way than usual, especially when compared with other types of interactions between

² Cf. "Fragment über die Liebe". Aus dem Nachlaß Georg Simmels, in: *Logos*, IO/ 1921- 1922, S. I- 54.

individuals, other type of relationships and other emotions. Love gives the individual a new social weight. Therefore, in Simmelian terms, we can state something that might seem obvious: love as an intimate relationship is also a social relationship. However, Simmel insists that relationships that remain on the sexual plane, or are clandestine and secret, are not necessarily always loving relationships.³ In sexual terms, Simmel demonstrates a relationship between love and nature and links sexuality with feeling. For Simmel sex is an impulse. In this context, he posits that it is the woman who has the responsibility to choose the most suitable subject for reproduction, thus linking marriage to a biological motivation.⁴ However, the German sociologist adds that sexual attraction and impulse do not necessarily transform into love. On the contrary, when love exists, all action is subordinated to it. (Oakes, 1984; Simmel & Bianco, 2010).

Throughout his work, Simmel discusses these ideas in terms of “forms”. For him, the goal of sociology involves studying social and cultural phenomena precisely as forms of interaction between individuals (Oakes, 1984). Forms create other forms, which in turn create still others. This is also how emotions function. Emotions are second-order forms for Simmel, insofar as they are states that contribute to the cohesion and duration of social relations. The particularity of these second-order forms is expressed in the way

³ Simmel also explored the sociological aspects of secrecy and asserted that “if human interaction is conditioned by the ability to speak, it is shaped by the ability to remain silent” (Simmel 2009: 40).

⁴ Simmel can be considered a theorist of sexual difference. Several of his writings focus on the male-female relationship (see Vozza, 2001). In his time, the first manifestations of women's vindication began, and from the theoretical point of view, “masculine and feminine are two ambivalent poles in the life of the subject” (Fornari, 2005, p.66).

they contribute to linking first-order forms of sociation⁵ with the duration/durability of society (Seebach, 2017). Consequently, it is possible to affirm that love is capable of not only generating relationships, but also creating social bonds that have a concrete and visible durability, exemplified by well-recognized symbols of society such as marriage or courtship (Seebach & Núñez Mosteo, 2016).

Undoubtedly, love is and has been a topic of interest for the social sciences; it has been approached historically from different disciplines such as philosophy, literature, anthropology, sociology, and psychology, among others. Although the field of research on love relationships is global in scale with important studies in Latin America as well as in Europe, it still has little space when compared to mainstream research that draws the attention of the scientific community and civil society, especially when love meets migration. Migration is studied with particular interest from a political and economic point of view, but little is said about migration from the point of view of affection.

Fortunately, sociology has not lost the motivation to continue exploring this theme that Georg Simmel pioneered. The sociology of emotions, for example, has documented how certain emotions such as love are contingent, and we can now say that love is part of a broader political economy that responds to interests of various kinds. In this context there is a kind of social agreement as to which emotions are considered appropriate and among whom (Ahmed, 2000). How these emotions can be interpreted varies according to time and space and implies a diversity of racialized bodies according to political, economic and historical interests. Therefore, we can deduce that despite all the possibilities that it offers today, modern love remains limited and conditioned. Migration for love, like so many other manifestations of love, faces different problems before it can be accepted.

⁵ “Sociation,” as Simmel uses it, refers to the pattern or form that a given social interaction adopts. In this sense, sociability, when speaking of love, is configured as a basic, even primary, relationship.

In search of love

There are several scholars who have sought to provide a satisfactory definition of love in the context of the social sciences.⁶ For example, Eva Illouz (2012) defines love as an emotion of utopian dimensions but sometimes excludes the importance it has in creating *sociability*. In *What's love got to do with it?* Thomas Scheff states that love is a multifaceted concept that has been transformed throughout political, social and cultural movements in history and is therefore practically impossible to define (Scheff, 2016). Assigning a rigid sociological definition to love risks excessively limiting this wide-reaching concept. Indeed, it is no coincidence that when love is studied, it is often segmented into the various aspects it comprises sexuality, courtship, the intimate sphere, family, infidelity, jealousy, etc. Trying to define an abstract concept can limit the scope of an investigation and exclude important aspects of the concept studied. In the context of a study on migration for love, thinking of love in Simmel's terms, that is, as a second-order form that creates social bonds that generate durability in time and space, has proved to be a useful sociological tool in explaining other aspects of this complex phenomenon that links the superficially disparate concepts of love and migration.

For example, the love stories collected from the interviews carried out during the fieldwork demonstrated just how many of these women sought to imitate the representations of love found in movies, poetry, songs and any other cultural manifestations, what Simmel considered “objective culture”. In explaining his theory of objective culture, Georg Simmel starts from an obvious truth: human beings construct social reality. However, the German sociologist then affirms that the cultural world generated by the individual has a life of its own and even ends up dominating the actors who contributed to its genesis. Simmel identifies the coercive

⁶ Cf. Beck, 1995; Beck & Beck- Gernsheim, 2012; Illouz, 2012; Luhman, 2010; Oakes, 1984.

action of objective culture on human beings in some everyday elements: language, traditions, religious dogmas, legal systems, scientific innovations, technological advances and, of course, love. According to Simmel's theory, objective culture expands further when the level of modernization of a society increases. In these circumstances, the number of constituent elements grows, and these elements are linked together to form a more complex and independent whole. Obviously, when we speak of “modern love” we are referring to the fact that relationship possibilities have multiplied and become more complex. However, there is still a sort of shared notion of love, a collective imaginary that has been represented and reproduced through cultural products that is easily recognized and adopted by individuals. During an interview Estela says:

I wanted an Italian husband and well, fate and the internet put him on my path. We were in the same city, got married and moved to Italy. I did not let go of my dream. I dared to live the experience. I was young.

40-year-old Estela, originally from Guadalajara, is 40 years old and has lived in Bassano di Grappa in the province of Vicenza for just over 5 years. Estela's perception of Italy and Italian men could perhaps be considered a shared conception of the Mediterranean peninsula:

My grandmother was very fond of Marcello Mastroianni's movies. She used to say that Italians were the most attractive people in the world. I think she was right. I grew up with that model that suggested that in Italy everything was romantic: the food, the coffee and of course, the men.

The rituals and myths that have been created around romantic love demonstrate how models of the couple, gender roles, family and marriage have transformed (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2012). Previously, “finding love” was contained by well-defined, bounded social rituals (Illouz, 2009); there were very specific prescriptions

regarding the behavior of men and women when establishing a loving relationship through courtship and marriage. Several aspects have influenced this transformation: a new configuration of gender roles, social movements and, of course, technology, all of which have clearly modified the social dynamics surrounding love (Roca, 2007). The mere fact of having a Facebook account or downloading a dating application can be a way for individuals to find the “love of their life”. The increased possibility of finding a partner and the ability to include individuals from other parts of the world in the pool of potential partners has made the phenomenon of migration for love increasingly common, and has allowed couples to endure over time, no longer restricted by geographic distance.

To make use of Simmel’s terminology once again, it could be said that modern love is a second-order form that maintains its durability through small daily rituals created by couples on a day-to-day basis, even if these rituals are at times mediated by new technologies. Apart from the cultural production around love (movies, series, Valentine’s Day celebrations, etc.), there is also an individual creation of codes and signs generated by couples themselves that translates into intimate rituals and undoubtedly creates new bonds and meanings (Illouz, 2012). This is visible in modern love relationships, and obviously in long-distance relationships, an increasingly common phenomenon in the context of a globalized consumer society (Roca, 2007; Sabugal, 2021).

Migration for love is circumscribed in this new social order in which the search for love seems to have no limits. Several of the Mexican women interviewed who migrated to Italy for love met their partners as they were hosts on Airbnb⁷ or Couchsurfing⁸,

⁷ Airbnb is a portal that connects people looking for short-term accommodation with people who have extra space to rent, usually in their own home.

⁸ CouchSurfing is a free hospitality exchange service that serves as a social network among travelers around the world.

through Tinder⁹ or while they were taking Italian lessons on Italki¹⁰. Subsequently, they continued the relationship through Skype meetings, Facetime and WhatsApp¹¹.

It has become clear that since the global health crisis known as the COVID-19 pandemic building a long-distance, open-ended relationship is increasingly sustainable. Couples can engage in a variety of activities such as having dinner together, watching a movie, engaging in small talk, experiencing jealousy, and even having sex just by connecting to their computers or phones (Beck & Beck- Gernsheim, 2012; Seebach & Núñez, 2013).

Rosa is 48 years old; she came to Italy 18 years ago to marry Simone in a small town in northern Italy. Here she describes her love story from before the advent of the Internet:

When I met my husband we used to send faxes to each other. I asked him to send them to my work because my dad at home was very strict with me. Later he came to meet my family in Mexico and my parents gave him permission to call me at home. I called him too, but always at work. I felt sorry that my brother had to listen to me. The most beautiful stage was when we used to send letters to each other. I think many of them were lost, but I saved some of them. I know that many couples now met each other through the computer. I don't say anything. But I think that before we knew that since contact was slower, it was more serious.

In 2020, 46.8% of the 12 million Mexicans living outside the country were women, a figure that places Mexico within the first

⁹ Application designed for dating or encounters currently active in 140 countries and with 50 million users.

¹⁰ Virtual language platform that connects teachers and students through video chat.

¹¹ Skype, Facetime and Whatsapp are platforms allowing users to make phone calls and/or video calls all over the world with just an internet connection.

five countries of origin with the highest number of female migrants in the world (INMUJERES¹²). We currently live in a social order in which women are once again demanding equality as a right and in which gender, as Judith Butler (2007) suggests, continues to be in conflict. Butler does not attempt to analyze the gender inequalities that persist in the economic or political realms, but rather focuses on a more hidden, personal realm in which women—ordinary women, during their daily lives, outside of any political agenda—have pioneered changes of great importance. These changes, such as deciding to have children or not and making a deep reflection on motherhood, essentially concern the exploration of the potentialities of a “pure relationship,” a relationship that presupposes sexual and emotional equality, an explosive concept for pre-existing power relations. It is no accident that migration for love has boomed in a historical and political context in which women seek more balanced love relationships. However, the search for this “balanced” love faces another difficulty: migration for love can consolidate a situation of dependency between partners and translate into episodes of violence and/or risk.

Love and relational sociology

Simmel sees society as a system of relationships. For Simmel, society is made up of relationships through which individuals influence each other. Sociology cannot study a phenomenon in general, but it must observe all the relations that exist between individuals involved. In the case of the study of modern love, sociology must focus on how relationships are established. Relationships are the object of sociology's study, and these are objectified and crystallized into something stable and lasting.

By adopting a Simmelian point of view, it can be deduced that love is a form through which the subject elaborates a social relationship with the world, where individuals enjoy an authentic

¹² Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (National Women's Institute)

and maximum freedom insofar as it is a relationship that is not pre-established by any other type of bond. Simmel says: “love determines the total and ultimate essence of its object and creates it as this object, which prior to this did not exist” (*Simmel*, 1984: 181). Love is an *a priori*¹³ for Simmel and the individual who loves is distinguished from the rest as they have been altered by a feeling of otherness. Adele Bianco (2010: 54) in the text *Georg Simmel: le forme dell'amore* states:

The love relationship then functions as a compass that regulates how we relate to the world, or rather, as Simmel argues, it constitutes “the absolute matter.”

Based on the relationship between the loving individual and their own conception of themselves an impact will be generated on all the other social relationships of the subjects.

Although there was already talk of modern love in the nineteenth century thanks to the consolidation of the romantic imaginary that was replacing the logic of family, social and economic convenience that previously ruled, it was not until the period following World War II that a new type of modernity emerged, and along with it, a new conception of modern love. Unlike the merely contemplative Platonic love, modern love proposed an apparent break in new relationship dynamics. At the end of the war, love occupied an urgent and necessary role in generating social bonds and encouraging social cohesion in all areas of society (Seebach, 2017). At the same time, morality and politics established their rules and

¹³ Donald N. Levine in introducing the selection of Simmel's texts, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, points out that forms are identical with Kant's *a priori* categories of cognition; but they differ from the latter in two important respects. They inform not only the cognitive realm, but each and every dimension of human experience. And they are not fixed and immutable, but arise, develop and, perhaps, disappear over time. Forms emerge to shape content when the undifferentiated unity of immediate experience is broken by some kind of tension (Levine in Simmel, 1971 [1858- 1918]).

limits for love relationships. Religion also functions as a fundamental principle for social organization in terms of defining what family, marriage and love relationships should look like (Napolitano, 2009, 2015).

Migration for love arises in this context of new configurations of and possibilities for love and is one of the many current modalities that the individual has sought to relate to the affective level within the framework of this new modernity. The various historical leaps from the nineteenth century to World War II and then the era in which we live today have confronted relationships of love with long and complex processes of transformation that have been permeated by various factors such as religion and politics. This process surely cannot be described in a single paragraph, and I wish to make only a brief mention of it here, since the development of migration for love throughout history lies outside the scope of this paper.

Although the phenomenon of migration for love has been distorted through inadequate approaches from areas such as sex tourism¹⁴, it has also allowed for a deeper reflection on the emotional dimension of migration and has offered new perspectives on other cases, such as the purchase of wives over the Internet or Internet brides¹⁵.

In the phenomenon of love and migration it is evident that when politics and morality are mixed, social relations are at risk (D'Aoust, 2013b). The subjects of a group or community are sometimes exclusionary in the name of love, and can at times create rigid and conservative social dynamics in order to protect loved ones. This

¹⁴ Cf. Piscitelli, A. G. (2008)

¹⁵ Internet marriages are arranged through agencies that organize meetings between women from developing countries and men, generally from Europe and the United States. The purpose of the meetings is marriage and the men choose women from a catalog in which, in addition to their photos, their measurements and weight are specified. See: Constable, 2009; Schaeffer-Grabiel, 2004.

may seem natural and logical, but eventually the question must be asked: from whom or from what should love have to protect us? Under the pretext of defending those we love the most, we could easily react and attack the other (Remotti, 2003, 2010). In the case of migration for love, there is a narrative of us against the others, as if the mixed couple attack the interests, principles, and values of the society in which it intends to insert itself. The media often picks up this narrative, constructing a discourse similar to that of a divisor identity, ultimately identifying an enemy of society (Appadurai, 2007). Love is an emotion capable of generating bonds and cohesion, but hate is just as capable of creating these same connections.

In his posthumous text *Fragmente aus einer Philosophie der*, Simmel (1985 [1921]: 184) states:

Social interaction based on affective behavior has always been interpreted as oscillating between two poles: altruism and egoism, including in the latter also letting oneself be carried away by instincts.¹⁶

Simmel argues on the one hand that egoistic behavior is oriented toward the self, while the other responds to the laws of nature and therefore has no orientation whatsoever. As mentioned above, the media, changing market policies, unstable politics and technological advances have also dictated new rules regarding approaches to love relationships. This second-order form is in continuous transformation and must constantly adapt to social changes as they arrive, in order to coexist with this tumultuous situation. Individuals have been practically forced to break out of traditional models and be creative in their ways of relating and loving. Whether romantic love will be obsolete in the future or will play a greater role in society remains an open question.

¹⁶ My own translation of the original German text

Love as identity

Gender is a cultural construct that orients and articulates a way of being and loving in society, and is therefore a source of identity (Butler, 2007; Hirsch, 2003; Remotti, 2010). The subject who loves is represented as such: “I love X” and I define myself on the basis of that love. I am the “girlfriend/wife of” or “X is my boyfriend/husband.” It seems that “I am” is in function of “the other”. No matter how much modern individuals are prone to new sex-affective models of relationship, there seems to be a constant need to reproduce traditional relationship models. It seems that love would be informed by gender. Therefore, in a couple relationship, men and women are expected to behave and act in a certain way.

Institutions such as the traditional family and the Catholic Church have turned marriage into a social and economic institution, which has become a crucial aspect of the analysis of the construction and reconstruction of gender. Social and cultural constructs change with migration as they combine the gender stereotypes of the country of origin with those of the country of arrival. Ways of relating, and sexual and reproductive practices are also modified according to the migration experience (Hirsch, 2003; Napolitano, 2002). In this sense, migration for love seems to be an opportunity to redefine social gender roles or affirm others. The experiences of interviewees oscillate between fleeing from traditional models of relationships and seeking that same model.

In most of the interviews, the Mexican migrant women emphasized that the reason that brought them to Italy is not in the least related to their economic or political situation. They often say that they had a good car, a well-paying job, an apartment of their own, a good economic position and a satisfying social life. However, one day they fell in love with an Italian man and, driven by this love, decided to migrate with the idea of fulfilling a dream that was apparently difficult to achieve in Mexico: marriage. “It’s because of machismo,” one of them said. However, despite the promises with which they left Mexico, the scenario, when they arrived, was not

what they expected. Most of them live in their spouses' hometowns and not in the big cities, places in which the economic and social crisis in Italy (job insecurity, the economic dependence of young people on their parents, a government with openly fascist tendencies) is more palpable. Many of them find that the man they married does not have a stable job and will take them to live with his mother and sisters, where the role of women is often reminiscent of traditional customs and habits. These women experienced discrimination because they do not fluently speak Italian or because they have darker skin, or because they simply differ from the standard expectations.

I have no problem with my mother-in-law. From the moment I arrived she asked me to call her –mommy, the one who gets on my nerves is my sister- in- law and neither my husband nor my mother-in-law do anything. At first I thought we were going to be like sisters because we are the same age, but no [...] We live in a little apartment that y hunsband's parents gave him... his mother lives in the apartment upstairs with her sister. Everything was bad faces and rudeness until one day she grabbed me alone and told me that I was not going to trick her and that she could not even believe that I was going to steal her brother and his things. His things?! They have a house in Rebibbia! I come from a very big house in downtown Oaxaca. One day I couldn't stand it and I told her: look, either you calm down or I'll calm you down, and I threatened her... I wasn't going to do anything to her either, but I took advantage of the fact that she thinks that all Mexicans are with the narco. She never bothered me again.

Migration for love translates into the social importance of getting married and having a family, to the extent that people are willing to leave everything behind in their countries of origin. However, migrants do not always fulfill the successive objectives of marriage and children. A common criticism of this type of migration is that these women are often left without a personal project in Italy, oring them to become housewives and to fall into a vicious cycle involving

discrimination and deprivation. Some of these women have even gone from the Mexican upper class to the Italian middle or lower class, which has social implications; they are no longer the women they used to be. This highlights the strength, and depth of the social ideal linked to marriage.

Bicultural marriages are microcosm in which it is possible to see the processes of integration (and exclusion) of migrants more clearly. In this context it becomes evident that there is no such thing as a neutral migrant; a person's sex, gender and sexual orientation come into play in each of the phases of the migratory experience (Constable, 2009; Djurdjevic & Roca Girona, 2016).

For Simmel love is a totalizing experience insofar as it involves the Self in all its wholeness. However, it is also a unique form of interaction that puts two totalities in relation, two subjects ready to put themselves at stake, to expose themselves to risk, at times even mortal, of letting themselves be contaminated by the other, of letting themselves be altered or transformed; however within this relationship the subjects must not fall into the trap of forgetting or annulling the other, because love demands differentiation, a reciprocal recognition of two unique and irreplaceable individualities. Simmel sees this function of risk that love fulfills as a characteristic that makes it indispensable for the social order. Feelings represent a social and culturally elaborated translation of emotions, and they function as one of the foundations of social order as an instrument of communication, socialization and even control (Toffanin, 2014).

There are a series of representations, practices and meanings associated with love that are intensified and transformed when going through the migratory experience. Love then becomes a relevant element in the analysis of identity processes. It is as if through the construct of love the women interviewed for this research justify their way of being and, more specifically, being in the society of the country they arrive in.

However, there are evident power asymmetries in several representations of romantic love, which problematizes the subject, and their cultural identity and self-representation. From the point of view of postcolonial studies that still question and problematize the relationship between Latin America and Europe, the bicultural couple comes into play, as a model that facilitates the dynamics of consensual subordination (Toffanin, 2014). Therefore, is it really the dream of romantic love that pushes these women to migrate to subordination and domestic submission?

“Moglie e buoi dei paesi tuoi”

This traditionally Italian proverb literally means “Wives and oxen of your land” and it means that you should marry someone who comes from your country and belongs to the same culture as you because only then can you understand each other and avoid misunderstandings and clashes. Falling in love and marrying a person from a distant land was a rarity at the beginning of the 20th century when Italians emigrated in groups and married outside Italy with fellow compatriots: with people from different provinces or regions of Italy. As Italians integrated with migrants from other nations, only the Polish or Irish, which were of the same religion, were considered for marriage.

Although the exact origins of this proverb are not known, it is evocative of life in rural Italy, where oxen represented the greatest investment and source of wealth for a family and was therefore comparable to finding a wife, since it meant not only a bond of affection, but also carrying on the family name and an ensuring survival. Celebrating a marriage between people from the same place meant preserving heritage and traditions. In the case of migration for love from Mexico to Italy, Elvira tells:

His mother had a heart attack when we told her we didn't want our daughter to have her first communion. I heard her yelling at my husband on the phone and telling him: ‘first you tell me

you're marrying a Mexican and now you come out with this. You want to kill me.”

In 1975, Cornelius Castoriadis used the adjective imaginary in his book *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, arguing that:

The institution of society is an institution of imaginary social significations which, as a matter of principle, must give meaning to everything that can be presented, both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ society. The social imaginary signification makes things to be such, presents them as being what they are. This is what is given by signification and is equivalent to a principle of existence, a principle of thought, a principle of value and a principle of action (Castoriadis, 1989: 4).

There is an imaginary around love insofar as love relationships have been influenced by institutions such as the Catholic Church through rites such as marriage and even defining the rules in courtship, the idea of family, the education of children and the exercise of sexuality. This imaginary representation of love governed by the Catholic religion affects how subjects behave in a relationship in specific social spheres.

The representations of love correspond to the cultural and social imaginaries of love. Love is a social construct circumscribed by a historical period and a cultural context that has a function among the members of a social group (Beall, 1995). Imagination has been recognized as a powerful force in the configuration of human action. During this research it was possible to ascertain how the diversity of perspectives embodied in the human understanding of love had somehow influenced the decision of Mexican women on whether to emigrate or not and how, whether to return to Mexico, or to move on. This research showed that the women’s idealized view of European men was key in their decision to be part of a binational marriage and migrate to Italy.

Love imaginaries are not floating forces imposed on us, nor something that "we" individually possess (Fassin, 2009). Imaginaries

are translated into concrete actions. In the narrative of romantic love for example, the individual does everything in the name of love. Simmel states that love is possible because this feeling is internal to the subject who loves, “in a latent state” or dormant, and does not manifest itself as something induced or solicited by something external. Rather, it seems to be a vital force that pushes the subject towards others, towards constructive interaction with his peers, favoring his attachment to the world (Bianco, 2010). Likewise, when Simmel speaks of the male-female relationship he observes that what is common in women's love experience soon becomes their own individual experience, strongly linked to family responsibilities, whereas for men this is not the case, as they experience love with women in a less individualized way, hence their less deep connection to the individual person (Simmel, 2001 [1921])

In the context of love and migration, marriage and family are not only the successive step of love, but a path to inclusion in the new society that welcomes them. However, this bond is also often a legal contract that conditions and limits them. Therefore, what ensures they are recognized as wives or mothers is also what limits their social position.

In the framework of modern love, the couple relationship is the one that lays the foundation for determining the rest of an individual's social relationships, an idea that is still quite attached to the traditional relationship. It follows, therefore, that in the context of the phenomenon of migration for love, the love relationship functions as a sort of “social regulator”. For Italian men, being married to a woman outside their cultural references conditions their relationships insofar as it creates a new type of coexistence with their environment, one that they likely never predicted.

Love, like all other affections, creates conditions for sociability and allows other types of relationships to be established, such as friendship. Several of the women interviewed complained of not having friends, explaining that even after spending years in Italy they feel that other women are often cold, distant, and sometimes hostile.

In the interview with Ceci in Rome, when I asked her what the most difficult thing about living in Italy, she answered:

The worst thing about living in Italy has been the Italian women. They don't know how to be friends.

Such relationships are fundamental in a migratory context, since the idea of generating a network of one's own, independent of the partner, intimate and everyday spaces outside of the relationship. This feeling helps migrants face the difficulties of living in a new society and not being totally dependent on one's partner. Ceci says:

For me my husband had become my everything: my boyfriend, my friend, my lover, my tour guide... my Italy. Before I met him, I had a life, but I was missing him. Now I have him, but I lack a life.¹⁷

The sympathy and empathy that occurs between the actors that make up a society, together with the sexual instinct between the subjects that love each other, guarantees social reproduction, according to Simmel. As the feeling of love consolidates and the subject feels a socially vital feeling, the society grows and solidifies (Simmel, 2009 [1908]). However, proximity, and shared spaces and habits do not necessarily imply that such feelings are generated.

Society is founded on a sense of belonging that is not always shared with the recently arrived social subjects. Simmel affirms that it is not possible for a society to experience feelings of empathy and sympathy related to love if they are not conceived, practiced, and lived by its members in a homogeneous way.

¹⁷ Roca (2009) uses the concept of "independent incorporation" where he points out that although the loving migrant has certain advantages over the economic migrant, such advantages depend on the native spouse. This may foster fear and submission associated with the fact that the relationship must work.

Conclusions

Simmel may not seem to be the most adequate author to account for the complexity of this phenomenon of love and migration but he provides important elements for its analysis: his concept of first and second order social forms, love as a factor of cohesion of social relations, the differences between love and sexuality, and his pioneering vision of the relationship between men and women. Although Simmel gives us certain key points for analysis that are still valid today, contributions from other authors are necessary to better understand other aspects of modern love: new technologies, rigid migration policies, etc. However, Love, as understood by Simmel, allows us to analyze how a society is built from the individual (the social subject) to the collective (social relations). Love migration as a sociological phenomenon implies considering social relations as dynamic. The loving migrant acquires an awareness of themselves and of others through the love relationship. This premise, in the context of migration for love, results in a sort of identity card with which the subjects present and represent themselves in the society that welcomes them.

In the case of Mexican women who migrate to Italy for love, it is clear how this possibility of leaving everything for love and move to another country, because it may seem modern is mostly the search for a traditional model that puts marriage and family first, ultimately reproducing the narrative of romantic love as sacrifice and the idea that everything is possible through love. Migration for love is therefore an example of love that is lived in modern times but at the same time pursues ideals linked to tradition and the established imaginary around love. In this sense Simmel is a useful author in that he gives us a language in which we can confront, analyze, and explore this modern phenomenon even if it is rooted in the past.

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