Moved by Love: The Experiences of Mexican Women Who Migrated to Canada for a Romantic Relationship

By

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Abstract

This thesis deals with love migration, a kind of mobility where the complicated and yet so common emotions and dynamics that characterize any romantic relationship intersect with the disruptions and processes of migration. Because love migration is a relatively unexplored area of study, the present work comprises an exploratory approach which focuses on the perspective of Mexican women who migrated to Canada for a romantic relationship. Specifically, this project aims to address the experiences of displacement and emplacement of love migrants. Put differently, it asks how Mexican women experience moving to Canada and adjusting to the country when their motivation is romantic love. To answer this question, I interviewed 15 Mexican middle-class women who settled in Montreal, Quebec and the greater area of Kingston, Ontario. The sample included participants in heterosexual and same-sex relationships with Mexican and non-Mexican partners they met “unexpectedly” in Mexico, online, or while travelling abroad.

The women I interviewed described falling in love with partners who complemented the autonomous lives they had constructed so far. Geographic distance opened the question of migration, and they moved to Canada hoping to build a future with their partners. However, in this thesis I argue that the process of migration challenged these women’s autonomy and romantic motivations. On the one hand, I found that love migrants’ displacement was a disruptive process. It confronted them with the emotional conflict of leaving their family and community behind, and it involved a bureaucratic process that questioned their romantic motivations and imposed restrictive regulations for the initial years of life in Canada. On the other hand, their emplacements comprised a process of self-determination. They had to actively work to make space for themselves in their romantic relationships and in the Canadian society. Overall, I argue that Mexican women’s love migrations are an expression of autonomy. And, despite the challenges and restrictions they encountered when moving to a
new country, their stories show the conviction they have to maintain a sense of independence and to construct the future they imagined when they decided to move to Canada.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I explore the experiences of women whose romantic attachments led them to move across geographic and cultural borders. I deal with love migration, a kind of mobility where the complicated and yet so common emotions and processes that come with any romantic relationship intersect with the experiences of migrating. Emotions are, therefore, central to these migrations. Scholars like Nicola Mai & Russell King (2009) have, in fact, emphasized the need to recognize that “migrations are rarely exclusively motivated by economic or political considerations, and that the full relevance of the decision to migrate and to continue living and working abroad can only be understood by bringing into the analytical equation the affective, sexual and emotional dimensions” (297). From marriages that lead to migration, to the growing trend of relationships that take place over the internet and which eventually lead to the migration of one or both partners, romantic relationships have become increasingly present as a driver for human mobility. The rise of globalization and modernity has brought with it greater access to transnational communication and travel, thanks to the advancements and affordability of electronic media and transport technologies. As a result, human relationships are no longer restricted to a specific location and they can occur across national borders. More importantly, as Arjun Appadurai argues in Modernity at Large (1996), with the advent of modernity, individuals can now easily create a “mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space” (6). The internet and social media, travelling and encounters with tourists, films, television, and popular culture in general have made it possible for us to imagine a relationship with a person from a different region and location, or to envision making a life outside of our own nation; in other words, there is a feeling of closeness to other cultures (Shaeffer-Grabiel 2004, 34). Intimate relationships, particularly between romantic partners, are bound to occur in the context of this globalization of human relationships. Even though love migrations have been rarely studied and they are often
misunderstood, what my participants’ stories demonstrate is that we can all be confronted with the possibility of migrating as easily as we can fall in love.

Beyond the recognition that love migrations have become more common in current times, the question that this thesis also aims to address is: what are the experiences and emotions that come with migrating for a romantic relationship? Love migration is a kind of mobility that invites an exploration of the role of emotions in all facets of human mobility, particularly because it is, by its own nature, emotional. If we consider sociologist Stephen Castles’ (2000, 15-16) important assertion that migrations occur not as a single event but as a life-long process, we must then also recognize the diversity of emotions that come into play in the process of relocating a life to a new country. After all, emotions shape and are shaped by experiences (Ahmed 2014, 7). What follows are the stories of Mexican women for whom love was just one of many emotions they experienced in migrating to Canada for a romantic relationship. Their migration stories demonstrate that not only people, but emotions also move and change in the process of migration (11).

**Purpose of the study**

My interest in love migration grew from my own experiences of migration for a romantic relationship. In 2012, I left Mexico to join my Luxembourgish partner in the United Kingdom, where we hoped to consolidate our relationship and form a life together. In the first months of my stay in the UK, I did not see myself as a migrant; however, the experiences navigating the British immigration system, encountering a culture so different to my own, and the realities of being far from my homeland and family eventually made me start feeling “different.” In the midst of these significant changes, I had also to adjust to living with a partner whose language, ethnic background, and nationality are different from my own. The entire experience was very emotional and I can say it continues to affect my life today. In the process of becoming a love migrant, I also met other women who had left their countries to
be in a romantic relationship, and I witnessed their struggles dealing with similar legal
labyrinths and the disorienting feeling of arriving to an unfamiliar place. What became clear
to me throughout this experience is that love migrations are common, but they often go
unnoticed and are frequently misunderstood. In my own love migration journey, as well as in
the process of researching and writing this thesis, I have encountered the scrutiny and
suspicion of people who consider that love does not constitute a “real” reason to leave a
country. Therefore, my intention in the present thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the
emotional side of female migration and to do so from the perspective of Mexican women
who, like me, left their country for the sake of a romantic relationship.

In my thesis I will focus on the experiential side of love migration. While the study of
love migration shares some ground with other much more explored areas like internet
romance, queer migration, and marriage migration, among others, these tend to focus on the
experiences of migrants either before migrating or after their migration. Thus, for this thesis,
I have decided to focus on both aspects. In the present work, I will analyze the
“displacement” and “emplacement” of Mexican women’s mobility to Canada. While I will
discuss my definition of these two terms in the relevant sections (see Chapter 2 and Chapter
3, respectively), some explanation is in order. Although “displacement” has often been used
to describe forced migrations – such as refugees or victims of environmental disasters
(Eastmond 2007) –, I have selected this term for this research because it stresses the centrality
of place in human mobility; that is, it enables us to understand that love migrants’
experiences and emotions are mediated by a movement between places, and that they are
affected by the relationships and characteristics they encounter within those places. Displacement is also a concept that points to the fact that mobility is not always a desired
situation, but – as we will see in my participants’ stories – it is sometimes the only option to
attain a certain level of emotional and social security in their lives. I have selected
“emplacement” as opposed to other much more widely used concepts such as “home,” “belonging,” and “place attachment” because it is a concept that does not assume that a person’s locality already implies attachment. Rather, it considers that migrants establish relations with “several places within transnational social fields” (Huttunen 2010, 239). Moreover, it points out the need to understand how migrants “encounter places, perceive them, and invest them with significance” (Feld & Basso 1996, 8). With these concepts in mind, this thesis will investigate the following research question:

   How do Mexican women experience the displacement and subsequent emplacement that result from a migration to Canada that is motivated by a romantic relationship?

The aims this research are: a) to record the participants’ love stories b) identify the factors that influenced the decision to migrate to Canada, c) explore the emotional and legal processes they went through in order to settle in Canada, and d) analyze the experience of making a home in Canada. Before moving on to the stories of the women I interviewed, it is necessary to give an overview of the existing literature that has approached the study of romantic relationships in the context of migration.

**Romance and female migration: A review of the literature**

The phenomenon of romantic love as a motivation for migration is nothing new. Indeed, romantic relationships have been a reason for migration either to form new relationships or to continue already established ones. An example are the European and Asian women who, after World War II, migrated to the American continent to marry their partners –known as war brides and picture brides, respectively (Tanaka 2004; Kim 2010, 719), as well as the women who accompany their partners in their economic migrations. Increasingly, romantic relationships have been recognized as a factor for mobility, particularly for women; however, these migrations have been predominantly studied from the lens of marriage. While this does not mean that researchers consider all marriage migrations to be the result of Western notions
of romantic love, their studies have paved the way for analyses of emotions, desire, and sexuality as factors in people’s mobilities (Williams 2010; Mai & King 2009). As we will see next, the study of love migration is the result of a shift in focus from marriage to romantic love as the element that motivates some migrations.

*Marriage migration*

In migration studies, romantic relationships have generally appeared in the context of marriage. Throughout history marriage has usually required the mobility of individuals – especially women – across considerable geographic distances. In fact, Charsley (2012, 3-4) reminds us that marriage usually implies the mobility of at least one partner, whether it is to live with the wife or husband’s family, or to form a new household. As transnational mobility has become a possibility and a necessity in some societies, marriages have also become an important feature of these mobilities. Scholars’ interest in addressing marriage as a motivation for, and a consequence of, migration has added two important layers of complexity to the field of migration studies: gender and emotions.

In their study on gender and migration, Palriwala & Uberoi (2008, 25) argue that, for years, migration scholars studied migration as a predominantly male phenomenon. The archetypical migrant moved for economic aspirations or political situations mainly to fulfill the role of breadwinner within the household. Meanwhile, women who moved as the wives of these men were considered passive agents of mobility, “entering migration flows primarily as ‘dependents’ … or merely as ‘associative movers’” (25). In other words, women’s roles in migration were seen as inconsequential. As a result, women were largely excluded from important migration studies (Parliwala & Uberoi 2008). Nevertheless, as feminist researchers noticed the sheer number of women engaging in transnational mobility due to their marital ties (Williams 2010; Charsley 2012), they called for a new research lens that would place
gender as the “central, determining factor in migration patterns (rather than just an extra variable)” (Williams 2010, 23). The inclusion of gender in migration studies brought attention to women’s roles in migration, as well as the specificity of their experiences. More importantly, it attracted greater attention to the role of agency in women’s mobility and other kinds of female mobility, for example, for economic reasons. Despite these advancements in the study of female migration, Palriwala & Uberoi (2008) have criticized the resulting studies because they see women’s migrations as either led by economics and modernity or marriage and tradition (2008, 26), making these motivations appear contradictory and mutually exclusive. Yet, the authors stress the fact that economic and affective factors can simultaneously motivate women’s migrations. Their view recognizes that non-material factors – like desires and emotions – as well as practical decisions – such as economic and professional development – can and do come into play in the process of women’s marriage migrations.

While Western cultures view marriage as an institution that celebrates “true love” (Alexandrova 2007, 144), studies in the field of marriage migration generally consider romantic love to be an aspect, rather than a central determining factor, of this kind of migrations (55). Instead, they understand marriage is a social institution that allows couples to officialise their relationships before a community (Williams 2010, 53) and to establish a family tie with each other. This definition of marriage has been useful in academic work, because it is inclusive of the diversity of ways in which marital partnerships are constructed across cultures. It understands that not all marriages are the result of romantic attachments. At the same time, this recognition that love is not central to all transnational marriages has raised suspicion from governments, the media, and individuals about the “truthfulness” of these relationships. A popular view is that migrating partners, especially women, use marriage to abuse the immigration systems of first world nations (Thibault et al. 2017). To disprove these
assumptions and show that marriages for convenience are the exception rather than the norm (Constable 2003; Williams 2010), scholars have focused on analyzing the emotions behind marriage migrations (Charsley, 2012, 7-8). After all, some women do consider love when deciding to migrate for a marriage. However, to understand romantic love within the context of marriage migration, it has become necessary to understand the emotions that trigger the desire for a partner and a marriage in the first place. So-called “mail-order brides” offer interesting insights into the analysis of emotions and desire in the context of marriage migration.

Mail-order brides

The study of mail-order brides considers romance as a central aspect of these correspondence relationships, but it also importantly describes how romantic love is constructed differently across cultures and individuals. “Mail-order brides” is a label used to refer to women who use online or mail catalogues and matchmaking agencies to meet partners from a country different to their own (Constable 2003; Shaeffer-Grabiel 2004; Johnson 2007). Scholars first became interested in mail-order brides because they noticed that women from third world nations met men from first world countries through catalogues and they eventually left their countries in order to marry these men. While the initial research focused on the marriage and mobility aspects of this phenomenon, more recently, researchers have begun to consider mail-order brides as cases of “correspondence romance,” where modern communication technologies, emotions, and the ideal of marriage have played a leading role.

Because mail-order brides are women who advertise themselves through catalogues, in the beginning, researchers tended to portray these women as “objects for sale and men as buyers” (Kim 2010, 720). This view is consistent to earlier studies, like the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, which saw brides as “objects of exchange, overlooking the bride’s perspective
and agency” (Constable 2010, 13). Thus, initial approaches viewed mail-order brides as a “singularly oppressed category of victimized women who are ‘trafficked’ and in need of rescue” (Constable 2003, 23), a view that prevails in popular culture. Feminist scholars criticized these early works because they ignore the voices and actual experiences of the women involved in such relationships (Kim 2010; Constable 2003). Consequently, more recent studies have focused on understanding the affective as well as practical considerations that influence women’s decisions to search for love outside their countries and, as in this case, to do so through correspondence. In sum, critical studies of mail-order brides shifted their focus from seeing these as cases of “marriage for migration,” to cases of “migration for marriage” (Kim 2010, 719).

One important characteristic of feminist takes on mail-order brides is that they stopped assuming marriage was a given for cross-border\(^1\) romantic relationships. For instance, in her book *Romance on a Global Scale*, rather than placing marriage at the centre of her analysis, Nicole Constable (2003) focuses on understanding the relationships that occur between American men and Chinese and Filipino women through online correspondence, and the journey that these couples go through in order to eventually marry and/or move in together. On the other hand, Ericka Johnson (2007) did an ethnographic work on Russian mail-order brides and, as opposed to Constable, she focused only on the perspective of the women. Johnson not only underscores the importance of “[letting] these women speak” (1), but she is interested in the processes of online courtship, the outcomes, and the way these women negotiate their relationship with men who have different national, cultural and linguistic origins to their own. More importantly, her work also considers what happens to women after migration, and the feelings they encounter as they navigate life in a

\(^1\) Here I use Lucy Williams’ (2010) concept of “cross-border relationships” to describe relationship that require a geographic migration, but which can occur between people belonging to the same or different ethnic and national groups.
new place where cultural borders exist within and outside their homes. The feminist approaches that Constable and Johnson adopted not only recognize the control women have “over the process of courtship and conditions under which a marriage takes place” (Constable 2003, 8), but they look at “the everyday challenges that take on new meaning when lives are transplanted to another part of the world” (30). In short, they identified women’s agency and emotions as central to understanding cross-border relationships.

Although these studies have contributed to expanding our understanding of romantic relationships in the global setting, there are some issues that they do not address. Firstly, although, as I mentioned, these works do not assume marriage is a given outcome of these relationships, the idealization of, and desire for, marriage are still a core aspect of their analyses; after all, marriage is often what drives mail-order brides to find romantic partners through correspondence. Therefore, we can say that these studies are not concerned with other types of romantic relationships and they are largely focused on heterosexual romances. Secondly, because they deal with the phenomenon of correspondence courtship, they only explore one kind of romantic encounter: through online or written interactions. And lastly, because the purpose of these studies is not migration per se, they do not explore in great depth the experiences of women who eventually migrate for their partners. The study of mail-order brides has made important contributions to understanding women’s mobility and romantic relationships that occur across borders. Further, it has opened up important questions about the role of modern technologies in the formation of cross-border romantic couples, and the challenges that come with these bicultural relationships. As we will see next, some scholars have attempted to address these questions through the study of love migration.

*Love migration*

As an area of study, love migration places emotions and desire at the centre of migration
experiences. As a concept, however, it is relatively new and not thoroughly documented or analyzed. The initial interest in this area can be traced back to migration scholar Russell King’s 2002 article “Towards a New Map of European Migration,” where he recognized that the freedom of movement and lack of borders between nations in the European Union called for new ways to explore human mobility. In this work, he identified the intersection of migration with alternative modes of mobility such as tourism, commuting, and student exchange experiences, to name a few. One section in particular was devoted to what he calls “love migration” and which he defines as “transnational intimacy,” explaining that: “students and tourists travel, study abroad, have sex, fall in love. Their subsequent locational behaviour and mobility/migration regimes may be more related to this libidinal factor than to any other” (2002, 99). As we will see, romance and migration as “felt” rather than planned decisions do not exclusively occur in Europe nor do they pertain to students and tourists only.

Love migration is an emergent area of study, and academic works that specifically address it are limited. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern two main approaches: firstly, studies that deal with love and migration, and second, works that explore love migration as a phenomenon of its own. Each category offers interesting analyses about romantic love in the context of migration, and they open important questions for further research. Works that focus on love and migration recognize romantic love as an aspect of some migrations, rather than as a central agent of mobility (Mai & King, 2009, 298). In the article “Love, Sexuality and Migration: Mapping the Issue(s)” (2009), Mai & King criticize the ways in which love has been researched within migration, because studies are “still quite rare and tend to focus on dynamics which are affiliated with, rather than central to, migration processes” (296). To them, the heteronormative marriage institution (marriage migration) as well as online romance (such as mail-order brides) are two dominant areas which have considered the role of romantic love in motivating certain migrations. The works of Lieba Faier (2007) and
Nadedja Alexandrova (2007) identify romantic love as a factor which affects women’s decisions to migrate to a different country. Faier deals with Filipina entertainers who migrated to rural Japan, while Alexandrova is concerned with Eastern European women who migrated to Western Europe. These authors address the ways in which their interviewees constructed and articulated romantic love as a mediator of their migration experiences. Faier, for example, focuses on Filipina migrants who moved to rural Japan under entertainment visas and eventually married one of their customers. She is concerned with romantic love and how her interviewees interpreted and professed this emotion to their Japanese partners. Due to the complexity of their romantic encounters and the social scrutiny that these women faced, Faier explains that her participants told “dramatic and romantic love stories” about “romantic courtship or love at first sight” (2007, 152). Similarly, she found that these women’s professions of love were not necessarily romantic, but rather expressions of gratitude and respect to their husbands. In other words, for these Filipina migrants, love was tied “to a man’s ability to financially and emotionally support his wife … and, above all, to the degree to which he supported her desire to send money to, and visit, her family abroad” (Faier 2007, 157). While Faier found that Filipina women constructed love differently from Western perceptions, she also emphasizes the importance that love has for these women’s decisions to move, to sustain their marriages, and to keep transnational links with their families in the Philippines. More importantly, she highlights the fact that romantic love is constructed differently across cultures.

Alexandrova’s work, on the other hand, is part of a larger study of Hungarian and Bulgarian women who migrated to Italy and the Netherlands. She focuses on love as an emergent theme among these migrants’ narratives, finding that they constructed love as a spectrum of emotions: “from love as passion to love as suffering” (143). Using a literary analysis, she identifies the different narrative plots these women told within this spectrum:
stories of distance, passion, and separation (2007, 140). Alexandrova concludes that the different conceptions of romantic love allow love migrants to make sense of their migration experiences: “romantic love, whether embraced or denied as part of the story of migration, is envisioned as a mediator of experience from which the women learn more about their own selves in a new environment and about their relation to others” (150). While the works of Faier and Alexandrova demonstrate the importance that romantic love can have for women’s migrations, they treat this emotion as an aspect that explains only a facet of women’s migration. In other words, the love and migration approach is not interested in placing love at the centre of their analysis, but it does recognize that it plays a part in women’s migration stories and experiences. At the same time, this approach opens the question of how and to what degree these constructions and professions of love influence other facets of women’s migrations.

Over the last decade, three works have emerged which have presented holistic analyses of love migration. What these works share is their interest in understanding the decisions and factors around cross-border couples: from how they fall in love and start a relationship, to the ways in which they sustain the relationship after migrating. The key themes that stand out from these studies are the intersection of romantic love with gender roles and family formation. Jordi Roca et al (2013) and Yvonne Riaño (2015) analyze the role that gender structures play in these migrations for love, both before and after migrating. In Migraciones por amor, Roca et al (2013) studied heterosexual relationships between Spanish men and Eastern European and Latin American women. Their study found that the women interviewed often chose to enter these relationships to move away from oppressive gender systems and enter what they saw as more equal societies; however, the authors noted a paradox: Spanish men looked for foreign partners in the hopes of finding women who would adhere to more traditional gender roles (65). In very similar terms, Riaño’s study (2015)
found that Latin American women migrated for relationships with Swiss men because they saw these relationships as more “ideal” and potentially more equal. However, upon migrating, these women found themselves having to replace their professional careers for full-time home-making activities, thus falling into more traditional gender roles (53). While Riaño noted a similar paradox to Roca et al, she concludes that the decision to accept less equal gender roles was mediated by the feelings that these women had for their partners: “women’s migration may be understood as both a way of opposing ‘traditional’ gender roles but also as a way of accepting and maintaining them for the sake of love” (2015, 56). In this sense, the works of Roca et al and Riaño understand that gender structures and emotions act simultaneously in women’s migration journeys, however paradoxical this may be.

A second theme in love migration studies is family. Sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim in their book Distant Love (2014), as well as Roca et al. (2013), analyse family from two different perspectives. For Roca et al., love migrations are, for the most part, family projects (63). As opposed to economic migrants, for example, rather than having a pre-established family project in their countries of origin, these women’s migrations represent a “project to form a family in the country of destiny, without any networks or support” (63). Here, much like works on marriage migration, romantic love becomes tied to family. Yet, the difference is that Roca et al. do not consider marriage as the ultimate way of expressing the desire for a family. Instead, their study includes cases where couples remain unmarried but in a family-like situation. At the same time, the authors found that women’s focus on forming a family rather than maintaining connections with families they left, meant that they created a relationship of dependency with their partners (268). The economic and emotional dependency that Roca et al. described can be linked to the problematic reconfiguration of gender roles that I described before. Further, this situation also shows that, in seeking to fulfil the desire to make a family, love migrants can find themselves caught up
in contradictory gender structures. For Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2014) romantic love and romantic relationships have contributed to the globalization of the family. They see not just people who move for romantic love, but also those who profess love across distance, or whose romantic encounters meant an encounter with cultural, linguistic, and other social differences (4). For these authors, romantic love has contributed to the formation of what they call “world families” and which they define as families where national borders intersect (15). In their discussion, they importantly criticize the heteronormative constructions of romantic love that are dominant in migration studies. They argue that the complexity of family formations in the context of migration not only includes ethnic and national differences, but also a diversity of understandings of the concept of family (3). They also contest the heteronormativity of couples, as well as biological parenthood, the formation of the nuclear family, the gender roles within the household, and the idea that couples come from the same location or that they reside in the same place (15). Thus, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim argue that world families “do not fit our preconceived notions of what constitutes a family,” but instead “they place a question mark over some of our familiar, supposedly self-evident assumptions about the family” (9). Although their analysis attempts to be inclusive of the diverse ways in which humans express romantic love and form relationships across borders, they have a limited understanding of migrants which ultimately restricts the scope of their analyses. They conceive of migrants as people who “have never previously left their home village or small town; many are provincial in their outlook and are wary of everything foreign. Some have become members of a world family only as the consequence of violence, civil war or expulsion, or in the hope of escaping from poverty and unemployment at home” (3). Through the works of Beck & Beck-Gernsheim and Roca et al, we can see that, family can be a central factor in love migrations. Similarly, their family approach reveals the need to move beyond heteronormative constructions of the family and to make way for alternative
understandings of the concept of family and couple formation. Finally, they make it necessary to ask to what degree romantic love and the ideal of a family might become constraints for women after migration.

Susan Frohlick’s (2009) work on sex tourism is also of interest here because it falls between the two approaches I have detailed above. Specifically, her article “Pathos of Love in Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica” deals with the intersection of travel, sexuality, emotions and migration. This work focuses on first world to third world female migration. It discusses European and North American women who travelled to Costa Rica, eventually fell in love with local men, and finally decided to remain in the country with them. It analyses romantic love as a motivating factor, but also the way it continues to affect these women’s experiences of migration. Frohlick’s article discusses two main points: romantic love as a cultural construct, and the power structures within cross-border romantic relationships. Frohlick describes the suffering and frustration that her interviewees experienced after remaining in a country that offered few opportunities for them, and where they were unable to fulfil their romantic expectations and Western constructions of love. Ultimately, these women’s narratives turned into bitter-sweet love stories as they attempted to impose Western ideals of love onto their Costa Rican partners by criticizing and attempting to “fix” these men’s “unromantic” behaviors (2009, 402). Frohlick importantly argues that, in the negotiation of cross-cultural relationships, power is not one-sided, but it fluctuates between both partners. Nevertheless, the incompatibility of expectations meant these women often found themselves betrayed and broken-hearted, and described themselves as “sick” or “addicted” because “they love too much” (396). Frohlick’s contribution to the study of love migration is the recognition that “sexual subjectivities, erotic desires and emotions both impact upon new forms of mobility and constrain as much as ‘free’ mobility” (2009, 403). Her work invites us to question how feelings of liberation and constraint fluctuate in love migrations.
Because love migration is such a novel area of study, the works I have reviewed here comprise diverse methodological and analytical decisions and, in many ways, they complement each other. At the same time, they also reveal important gaps that this thesis will attempt to fill: first, how emotions affect women before and after migrating; second, the need for an analysis that focuses on the female perspective; and last a more careful consideration of the women’s sociocultural backgrounds. My first concern is with the lens that has been used to explore love migrations because, although we can define these migrations as emotional, so far the full scale of emotions in these migrations has not been considered. For example, Riaño crucially suggests addressing the question of what happens to love after the borders have been crossed (2015, 44). Moreover, most of the works reviewed here highlight the importance of ideals of equality and liberation for love migrations. However, I echo Riaño’s argument that there is a lack of understanding of “the extent to which gender inequalities in the countries of origin affect women’s decision to move across borders,” (2015, 44). It is precisely because of these intricacies that there is a need for a larger study whose focus is solely on the female perspective of love migrations. So far, the works that have dealt with women’s experiences (Alexandrova 2007; Faier 2007; Frohlick 2009; Roca et al 2012; Riaño 2015) examine only one aspect of these migrations – romantic love, gender structures, or transnationalism. Finally, researchers have the tendency to focus on wider geographical regions like Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America for their studies. This is not only true for works on love migration, but also for those on marriage migration and mail-order brides. This decision can be attributed to an interest to investigate female migration across more than one country or the decision to use the location of the men as the place of study (Roca et al. 2013; Frohlick 2009). These decisions, can have important research implications, like observing migration from East to West, and from “first world” to “third world countries.” Yet, factors related to women’s countries of origin influence their decisions
to migrate, their understandings of love, and their eventual experiences abroad. Thus, in order to place women at the centre, I suggest also placing their country of origin as a central piece for understanding their migration stories and experiences. Accordingly, this thesis will adopt an emotional lens to the study of Mexican women in Canada. The next and final section of this literature review will examine research on Mexican women and migration.

**Mexican women, intimacy, and migration**

Even though some love migration studies have considered Mexican women, they have been usually grouped under the more general category of Latin America (Roca et al 2012; Roca et al 2013; Riaño 2015). Although it is true that Spanish-speaking countries in this region share a history of colonization and a heritage of mixed Spanish, Indigenous, and Black roots, this does not mean that their understandings of gender roles, sexuality, intimacy, and romantic love are always the same. Indeed, as Katie Willis (2014) argues, the modernity and globalization that have reached Mexico in the past decades have “framed public discourses and collectively-shared cultural models of intimate life” (13). While Latin American countries have similar histories of colonization and independence from the Spanish crown, their subsequent national formations, as well as their encounters with modernity and globalization, have not affected their societies and cultures in the same way. It is, then, important to consider the particularities of countries within this region to gain a better understanding of the social, historical, and cultural codes that explain women’s understandings of romantic love, romantic relationships, and indeed of their gender roles and ideals of equality.

Mexican popular culture has always celebrated romantic love (LeVine & Sunderland Correa 1993, 54). Although for the most part, this is due to the popularization of state-sponsored *telenovelas* or soap operas and the dissemination of ideals of romantic love,
Mexicans’ understanding of love can be traced to the intimate space of the family. In her work on intimacy in Mexico, Rosario Esteinou (2014) specifically explains that it was through the transformation of marriage from a religious to a civil affair that romance entered the national and social imaginary of this country (38). Indeed, love became a necessary “ingredient” for the formation of a family (39). And while we can credit this change for bringing more freedom of choice and flexibility to the formation of couples, it also consolidated the division of gender roles into “breadwinner” husband and “home-making” wife. Women in particular became attached to two specific narratives: the “faithful, devoted wife” and the “devoted, self-sacrificing mother” (40). Although these narratives emerged at the beginning of last century, they continue to dictate the way women are viewed and how they view themselves in Mexico. More striking is the fact that, in academic works about Mexican migration, these two roles dominate the discussions.

Although there is a vast number of works on the economic, social, gendered and political dimensions of female Mexican migrants, these have largely examined their roles as wives and mothers. This has to do with the fact that most Mexican migration is to the United States, a place where there has been a huge interest in developing the field of migration studies (Ong 1999, 8-10). But it is also connected to the fact that these migrations are for the most part economic, meaning that the women involved in these migratory patterns usually move with or for their families (Massey et al 2006, 65). Yet, this assumption has become highly limiting and problematic, because it ties these women’s agency directly to their roles within the household and it sees them as passive agents of migration. More alarming is the fact that these analyses have largely focused on migrations of women from the rural and working-class sectors, which reveals how restricted and limited the study of Mexican female migration has been so far. It is because of this stereotyping of Mexican migrants, and of
women in particular, that it is necessary to have further approaches to middle-class migration from Mexico.

The fact that the literature on middle-class Mexican migrants is not as vast as that of working class migration to the US is perhaps related to King’s (2002) criticism that “there is a tendency for migration not to be documented if it is not seen as problematic” (101). However, works that do exist have been helpful in challenging the idea that the Mexican migrant is a homogenous category. For the study of women, this approach includes a move away from the wife-mother narratives, and into an analysis of more complex power structures and motivations. At the same time, the fact that middle-class women have privileges – such as an education, profession and financial stability – begs the question of why they would engage in a migration process on the first place. On this, Massey et al. (2006) found that, unlike their male counterparts, higher education increases the likelihood of Mexican women’s migrations; by contrast, a higher rate of employment decreases women’s probability of migration (64). This statistical analysis highlights that there are reasons, not necessarily economic, that move middle-class women away from Mexico. In her work on Mexican cyberbrides, for example, Felicity Schaeffer-Grabel (2004) explains that “global fantasies” about the American way of life motivated middle-class Mexican women to search for American partners. Nevertheless, Schaeffer-Grabel also considers that, more than just fulfilling the fantasy, what these women seek in their cross-border relationships is a way to attain “more stable and liberating lifestyles” and to have “more opportunities than found in their local environments” (34). The Mexican experience in Canada represents an interesting case because the majority of Mexican migrants in this country are middle-class. So far, no academic work has dealt with the experience of middle-class Mexican women in Canada, and my thesis attempts to fill this gap. An examination of Mexican women’s experiences in Canada can contribute to challenging the construction of the Mexican woman as wife and mother. More importantly, in
bringing attention to the emotional dimension, perhaps we can approach Mexican migration in a more nuanced and humanizing way.

**Researching love migration: methodology and sample**

In this section, my aim is to describe the methodology and sample for this study. This will not only be helpful in giving context to my findings, but to understand some of the unexpected outcomes of this research. It is, after all, through my participants that I gained a more complex understanding of what migrating for a romantic relationship means. Yet, before detailing how I found participants for this work and who they are, I want to share two anecdotes which reveal some of the challenges I had to face conducting this research.

During the early stages of this work, in the autumn of 2016, I became an active participant of the Mexican community in Montreal as a way to explore possible paths for this research. One of the many gatherings I attended was the Independence Day celebration organized by the Mexican Consulate. At this point, I had made some acquaintances within the community, and one Mexican friend had suggested that we attend this event together. When the party was fully underway, I found myself sitting with three women, friends of my friend, whose conversation revolved around how much they still missed Mexico: “it’s a feeling that never goes away,” one of them commented. “Even now, after nine years in Canada, and though I’m in love with my husband, I still get sad whenever I think that I left Mexico and my family behind.” Once the first woman finished her story, I started a conversation with the other two, and asked what brought them to Canada. “My partner” was their response, echoing the first story I heard. I was surprised by this, especially since the majority of my Mexican acquaintances had come to Canada either for professional or academic development, or as refugees. That evening, however, each woman took a turn to tell her love story: they described how they met their partners by chance, how these men courted them with flowers and sweet words and how, when they finally became a couple, they had to go through months
of separation and bureaucratic uncertainty before they were finally reunited in Canada to start
a life together. More importantly, their narratives revealed ambivalence towards their life in
Canada: they felt torn between having a loving and caring partner, and wanting to be back in
Mexico with their families. As was obvious from the effort they put in recounting their love
stories, these women had never met each other, and later I learned that they only knew one or
two other women in Montreal who are in a similar situation. Knowing that there are many
events and forums for the Mexican community in Montreal to connect, I wondered why there
seemed to be no connection between these women and other love migrants. Now, after
interviewing many more love migrants, I can speculate that it is because love migration – or
moving to a different country for a partner – is not an experience that is immediately
discussed within migrant communities.

I could confirm this point with my second anecdote. To prepare for recruitment, I
decided to print my posters at a local shop. As I discussed the specifics with a Chilean shop
clerk, he looked at my poster and commented: “Ah! I’m sure there’s many women in this
situation here in Montreal, but whether they want to talk about it or not, that’s another story.”
I asked him why he thought so, to which he replied that “some of those women still think it’s
a bad thing, that it’s not appropriate to talk about coming here for a man.” This brief
encounter emphasized the stigma associated to this type of migration and which some of my
participants described too. It is a stigma that not only affects how these women are viewed,
but also their desire to speak openly about their experiences. These two anecdotes reflect very
well the concerns with which I approached my fieldwork. Not only was I faced with the
challenge of finding Mexican female love migrants, but also with the uncertainty of not
knowing if women would be willing to participate in an interview and discuss their stories
and emotions so openly.
An Emotional Approach to Love Migration

Over the past years, migration scholars have turned their attention to emotions. They have explored, for example, how emotions influence migrants’ decisions to move, as well as the way they resonate in their day-to-day experiences in a new country, and in their transnational activities (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015; Svašek 2010). In many ways, they are guided by Svašek’s assertion that “to unravel and understand the social, economic, political and experiential complexities of human mobility and belonging, it is necessary to include a focus on emotions” (2010, 867). My interest in using emotions as an analytical lens grows out of these works. More specifically, I decided to use the emotional geographies approach because it allows the researcher to situate herself at the “intersection between mobility and affective investments” (Alexandrova 2007, 105). Before expanding on the aim of emotional geographies, I would like to make sure that we understand what emotions are and how they work.

Although emotions have been largely theorized as interiorized feelings, over the last decades there has been increasing recognition of the central role that society, culture, and space have in their construction. In her Cultural Politics of Emotion, Sara Ahmed (2014) explains that emotions have been theorized in two ways. The dominant psychological theories follow what Ahmed calls an “inside out” model, which sees feelings as developing within us and then moving towards objects or others, only to finally return to us. In contrast, sociologist, anthropologists, geographers, and cultural theorists like Ahmed consider an “outside in” model, where emotions “come from without to move inward” (2014, 9). If emotions are external to us, what are they and how can we explain our interactions with them? Here, I follow Ahmed’s theory, which considers that rather than being objects that can be grasped and owned, emotions are immaterial, although they are always connected to objects. Indeed, in this theory, emotions are relational, because they are always “about”
something (Ahmed 2014, 7). This “something” is what Ahmed calls “objects of emotion,” a concept that is not limited to material objects, but which also refers to ideas, memories, and sensations, among others. Feelings, accordingly, are the product of our interaction with these objects; and, more importantly, the feelings that arise from these interactions are a way for us to “feel” the borders that exist between our bodies and others (6). What Ahmed suggests here is that our “contact” with other bodies and objects is always already charged with cultural, historical, and social codes that determine the feelings that result from such interactions. In sum, emotions exist within objects, and our relation to those emotions is determined by our sociocultural and historical contexts.

Consequently, emotional geographers are specifically concerned with the way emotions are articulated and constructed through socio-spatial interactions (Davidson 2007, 3). They understand emotions as relational fluxes or currents, rather than “objects” or “things” (Davidson et al. 2007) to be studied. And while they also see emotions as contained within objects, they are mostly interested with how they exist within and around spaces and places (3); after all, as Davidson & Milligan argue, “place must be felt to make sense” (2004, 524). Migrants’ experiences are highly charged with emotions. Their movement implies an encounter with new social, geographic, cultural, and linguistic environments and, in turn, these interactions become “generators of particular affects” (Condradson & Mckay 2007, 170). In this sense, we can ascertain that migrants’ emotions shape and are shaped by their experiences (Ahmed 2014, 7). With this in mind, the emotional geographies lens is useful because it attends to the mobility and location so crucial to understanding migration experiences, but without neglecting the feelings and emotions that result from them. This thesis aims to theorize Mexican women’s experiences in more depth especially since these women already understand their migrations as emotional.
Narrative as a Methodology

Because the aim of this thesis is to understand the experience of love migrations, an immediate challenge was finding a way to analyse the participants’ experiences and emotions. Narratives have a central role in this respect, because through them we are able to turn our experience of the world into “coherent, meaningful, unified themes” (Polkinghorne 1988, 126; Van Maanen 1990, 38). More than descriptive mediums, narratives reveal the way in which individuals make sense and assign meanings to their experiences (Elliott 2014; Polkinghorne 1988). For sociolinguist Charlotte Linde (1993) and philosopher Adriana Cavarero (2000), narratives are an important tool to understand our selfhood. According to these authors, in order to make sense of ourselves, we create “life stories.” Linde (1993) defines life stories as narratives we use to express “who we are and how we got that way” (1). She conceptualizes them as “social units” because the purpose is to exchange them with others. On the other hand, Cavarero (2000) also highlights the social importance of life stories by considering the link between storytelling and the construction of our selfhood. She uses the classic myths of Oedipus and Ulysses to demonstrate how, beyond using narratives as a way to make sense of who we are, there is an inherent desire to create them so others can tell our story (32). As she explains: “we perceive ourselves and others as unique beings whose identity is narratable in a life-story” (33). Thus, narrative is more than a tool to make sense of our experiences; however, through this intrinsic act of meaning-making is that we ultimately understand ourselves and can interact with others.

Narratives also play a key role in the experiences of romantic relationships and migration. In his analysis of romantic love and modernity, Anthony Giddens (1992) considers that love “introduced the idea of a narrative into an individual’s life” because storytelling is an essential element of romance which requires that we define the self against the other (39). After all, Gidden argues, “the rise of romantic love more or less coincided with the
emergence of the novel” (38). Although other scholars (Polkinghorne 1988, Van Maanen 1990, Linde 1993, Elliott 2014) concerned with the phenomenological dimension of narratives would argue that self-narratives existed prior to romantic love, Giddens’ analysis underscores the role that narrative plays in the construction of the self and of our emotions. In terms of migration, Olivia Espin (1997) considers that life-changing experiences can disrupt the linearity with which we conceive our life stories. Accordingly, migration as an event that “disrupts and detours the life course” (450), can force us to rewrite or reconsider our life stories. This is because migration changes the person’s milieu, and the new sociocultural context ultimately allows for a different kind of story. In her empirical work, Espin found that migrants often create narratives to “recover the thread of [their] own life after migration” (1997, 450). Narratives are, thus, not only tools to make sense of our experiences, our emotions, and ourselves, but more concretely, they are necessary to regain a sense of self after going through life-changing situations like migration.

As a methodology, narratives have become useful in qualitative research that specifically deals with vulnerable populations. Initially, it was feminist researchers who began using narrative as an interview method to “fracture and break conventional, masculine interviewing styles” (Miles & Crush 1993, 92). The traditional interview is usually informed by the use of pre-established questionnaires that interviewees are expected to answer in a formal setting. The main critique has been that they leave no room for interviewers and interviewees to build a close relationship and, as a result, this can lead to a power dynamic where one extracts knowledge from the other. I want to clarify that traditional interviewing methods can be necessary, depending on the research design and objectives. However, as Miles & Crush highlight, it can be inadequate for studies that seek to understand subjective situations (1993, 88). Specifically, works which seek to give individuals more visibility have found traditional interviews are not adequate for their purposes. As opposed to the traditional
variant, a narrative interview allows for a deeper exploration of a topic by addressing not only the main interview questions, but the context around participants’ responses and experiences (85). This also means that the interviewer and informant can build a closer and – of particular importance to the present work – a more equal relationship. In other words, the researcher places herself at the level of her participants. I selected this approach to collect data for this research for two reasons: firstly, being a middle-class Mexican woman myself, I needed to create an interview setting where my participants could feel that I understood where their thoughts and experiences were coming from; secondly, in order to document the emotions of my participants’ migrations and the meanings behind those emotions, it was important that we develop an openness and willingness to share very personal perspectives.

Aside from its usefulness in exploring experiences and emotions, I am interested in a narrative methodology for its relational quality, and the ethical possibilities that this quality implies. Miles & Crush (1993) describe personal narratives as “interactive texts,” because they vary depending on the way in which the conversation takes place, as well as the degree of trust that exists between the storyteller and the audience. Whether the researcher is an insider or not, the place of the interaction, the language used, the atmosphere, and the way the questions are posed, all contribute to determine an informant’s decisions of what she tells about her life story and how she tells it. As a data collection method, narrative interviews are collaborative and interactive processes (Miles & Crush 1993) where the informant constructs the story with the help of the researcher. Ethically speaking, because of the interactive aspect of narrative interviews the interpretation of an informant’s story is not solely left to the researcher, but is a shared task too. As Elliott (2014) explains, a narrative methodology turns interviews into sites of knowledge-production. It subverts the traditional researcher-informant power dynamics by allowing the informant to actively engage in the meaning-making process of her own story. In the context of migration, much like in Espin’s work, narratives can help
migrants to make sense of their lives after their migration (1997, 450). Although it is true that as a researcher I still hold power over how these narratives are understood and presented in this thesis, using a narrative-based interview methodology gave my participants the opportunity to explain and reflect on their own answers, rather than just providing responses.

Accordingly, in-depth interviews were my main source of data collection for this thesis. Following the approval of the university’s General Research Ethics Board (see Appendix 1) I conducted a total of 15 interviews. The language of the interviews was Spanish, the participants’ native language, and each interview lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours in total. Although initially I informed all participants about the possibility of a second and final interview, due to time constraints, there were no follow-up interviews. In terms of the location, I gave each woman the option to choose a place that was comfortable enough to tell her story as openly as possible. In most cases, the location was either a coffee shop or restaurant (in Kingston or Montreal, the two recruitment locations) and, on some exceptional occasions I was invited to the participant’s home. The interview process consisted of introducing participants to this research through the Letter of Information and Informed Consent documents (see Appendices 2 and 3). Once they signed the Consent and agreed to participate, I established my expectations for this interview: I explained to the participants that the interview was a space for them to talk with as much detail and openness as they needed about their experiences of migrating to Canada. In an attempt to make the interview process a collaborative space, I asked the interviewees to treat the interview as a conversation, rather than as a questionnaire. This way, I turned the interview into a space for participants to express themselves openly and comfortably. This also meant that I had to be an active participant in the conversation. Thus, I chose not to take notes during the interview in order to make it as close as possible to having a friendly conversation; however, I kept my interventions to a minimum, preferring to listen attentively. To this, one participant
commented that “it feels almost as if I am talking to my psychologist,” a comment that reflects the level of openness with which these women discussed their stories with me. To document their responses, I recorded the entire interview with their explicit and prior permission; all participants agreed to be recorded. Similarly, I prepared an interview guide (see Appendix 4) with a list of the main topics and aspects of their journeys to explore. I only consulted this guide whenever I needed to remind myself of a particular theme to discuss. Because I am also a love migrant, before introducing the first question, I told my migration story so participants knew that they were speaking to someone who had gone on a similar journey. In many ways, my own experiences of immigration and romantic love were helpful in creating rapport and consequently gaining more insight into the emotional aspect of participants’ experiences. Once I briefly told my own narrative, I introduced the general question “can you tell me how you met your partner?” to start the conversation. This was a strategic first question, as it transformed the interview session into the telling of a love story, but it also took us back to the beginning of their migration stories. Overall, participants’ initial responses provided plenty of data from which to build any subsequent questions. Similarly, it was through this strategy that we could sustain the atmosphere of the interview as a conversation, allowing us to collaborate in building their love migration narratives.

Recruitment

Given that love migration is a relatively new concept, there is not an agreed definition of who is, and who is not, a love migrant. For recruitment purposes, this posed both a challenge and an advantage. While the few works that have developed this area (Riaño 2015, Roca et al 2013, Frohlick 2009, Johnson 2007, Constable 2003) understand love migrants as individuals whose romantic attachments motivated their migrations, the majority of researchers have solely focused on heterosexual, binational relationships. However, for a field that sees emotions as the central motivation, this seems a rather limited analysis of love migration.
Similarly, few works (Roca et al 2013) have explored cases where the relationship did not work or where it ended after migration. I therefore decided that my recruitment criteria would use only the basic definition of love migration – namely, migrations motivated by romantic relationships. Thanks to this approach and to the diversity of love stories and interpretations of romantic love that my participants shared I am able to expand the definition, as I discuss in Chapter 1. There were, of course, other methodological considerations for adopting such an open definition of love migration. Due to the stigma, a lack of established communities, and overall a lack of research on this area in the Canadian context, I was unsure of whether I would find women willing to be interviewed, so I designed the recruitment criteria in a way that emphasized the emotional aspect of this migration. To be more specific, the inclusion criteria looked for women born in Mexico and residing in either Montreal or Kingston, who identified a romantic relationship as their main motivation to come to Canada, whether it was with a Canadian or a non-Canadian partner. Unlike other love migration researchers (Riaño 2015, Roca et al 2013, Frohlick 2009, Johnson 2007, and Constable 2003), I decided not to place restrictions on sexual orientation or status of their relationship (i.e., whether they were divorced, married, common-law, or other conjugal situation), nor on the nationality of their partners. As for the exclusion criteria, I had only one point and it related to marriage: I decided not to include women who had married prior to their migration, unless this marriage was a legal or familial requirement for their migration. The reason behind this was to differentiate between women who migrated for the impulse of a romantic relationship from those whose mobility was part of a familial decision. In all, this strategy proved to be successful, and close to 30 women showed interest in taking part in this research.

The recruitment took place in the cities of Montreal, QC and Kingston, ON, and it followed two main strategies: online groups and posters. Firstly, I joined online private groups on Facebook specifically geared towards Latin Americans and Mexicans living in
Kingston and Montreal, as well as some online newsletters. During the pre-research stage of this work, I had already been accepted to some of these groups; however, I noticed many of them, particularly in Montreal, were not very active, and were often used primarily to advertise products and businesses. For this reason, I adopted a second strategy only for Montreal, which involved placing posters in areas where the Latin American community is more affluent (see Appendix 5). In the end, the online recruitment turned out to be the most successful and efficient way to get in touch with potential interviewees, because they were able to immediately ask for more information and set a time and place for the interview. This interaction also helped to create rapport as we could chat and get to know each other before the actual meeting. Although I recruited most participants through Facebook groups, one contacted me through a newsletter circulated among a Latin American community, and one more via email. There were two rounds of recruitment with the aim of interviewing at least 12 participants. The first round occurred from the end of November to the beginning of December, 2016. During this round, 7 women contacted me in total – 4 in Montreal and 3 in Kingston – all of whom completed interviews. The second round took place at the beginning of January, 2017, and this time the response was overwhelming: over 20 women showed interest in taking part on this project. In the end, to make the sample size manageable within the timeframe assigned for this research, I decided to interview only 8 more women. By the end of January, I had completed a total of 15 interviews.

In contrast to the context I described in my anecdotes, my second round showed that women were in fact very willing to discuss their stories. Some of them mentioned that they had never talked about their stories before, and they wanted to take this opportunity to do so. Others located in cities in Canada outside the scope of this research, asked if they could be included. While I was forced to exclude many of these women, their interest goes to show that there is a large number of Mexican love migrants in Canada. At the same time, having to
exclude so many participants became an ethical challenge. As a researcher, I felt it was important to include as many voices as I could, but I knew that, due to limited resources, it was impossible to include everyone. This made me reflect on the ethical dilemma that we encounter as researchers when we face the prospect of excluding some of their voices in order to meet the goals of our own research. At the same time, the overwhelming number of women willing to talk about their experiences points to the need to discuss love migration more openly and to critique the structures that continue to stigmatize migrations that are described as explicitly driven by emotions. My hope is that this work will contribute to keep the conversation open.

Sample

In total, the sample for this research consisted of 15 Mexican women, 12 recruited in Montreal, and 3 in the greater area of Kingston, Ontario. Although the sample includes women from two provinces in Canada, due to the disparity in number of participants, this thesis will not attempt to do a comparison based on the specificities of each location. It will, however, highlight the small-town vs city differences that exist between these locations in cases where it is relevant to the participants’ experiences. In terms of demographic distribution (see Table 1), the ages of the women in this sample ranged from 22 to 55 years of age, the majority of whom were between 36 and 40 years old (5 participants), followed by women between 26 and 25 years old (4 participants). Their number of years living in Canada ranged from 1 to 30 years, although the majority had been in the country between 1 and 9 years (13 participants). Mexico City was the hometown of most women in this sample, followed by the neighbouring State of Mexico. Other places of origin included urban areas in the states of Chiapas, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Nayarit, and Oaxaca (see Figure 1).
Table 1. List of participants and demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Conjugal Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Current Occupation in Canada</th>
<th>Partner’s Name</th>
<th>Partner’s Nationality</th>
<th>Years in Canada</th>
<th>Migration Route</th>
<th>Province of Migration</th>
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<td>Sales assistant</td>
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<td>Marriage</td>
<td>Ontario</td>
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<td>Dental assistant</td>
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<td>Unemployed</td>
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<td>Marriage</td>
<td>Ontario</td>
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<td>Married</td>
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All the women I interviewed belong to the middle class in Mexico. I want to make a brief note here on how to understand the participants’ middle-class status based on the particularities of the Mexican context. In Mexico, the middle class is an ambiguous rather than a fixed category, and this category is not only measured through income, but through other important variables. Daniel Nehring explains:

The Mexican middle class can be defined – provisionally and in an approximate way – in terms of, first, its relatively elevated academic capital, characterized by high levels of schooling and frequent access to university education, second, specific occupational position ranging from the ownership of small businesses to middle-level white-collar employment in public administration, academia, and private enterprise, and third, typical patterns of residence, variable but commonly strong access to property and consumer goods, and intermediate income levels sufficient to afford the outlined way of life (2014, 111).

Further, the Mexican middle class tends to be sub-divided into lower, middle, and upper levels, making the line between the lower class and lower middle class blurry and often difficult to define. As a result, Schaeffer-Grabiel explains that Mexicans have adopted markers such as “foreign products and lifestyles, education, careers, and cultural and moral standing” in order to “distinguish themselves from the lower classes as well as to claim an
affinity with a global cosmopolitan class” (Shaeffer-Grabiel 2014, 36). For the purposes of this thesis, I have based my understanding of the participants’ middle class status on two main aspects: firstly, in some cases, they made their social position clear in their narratives. They explained that they had access to comforts such as private education, a car, leisure travel, and their own living arrangements either through their families or through their own income. In fact, some women said that in Mexico “economically I couldn’t complain. I could afford my own things, I could travel, I could do many things.” Alongside the comforts they said they enjoyed, they also stressed the importance of having stable employment to sustain their lifestyle. A second aspect is their level of education and professions: all the women in this study completed—or were in the process of completing—at least an undergraduate university degree, and they had predominantly worked in offices or as small-business owners in areas such as medicine, dentistry, law, IT, tourism, education, and accounting, among others.

The participants’ relationship formations are also of great interest. In fact, the diversity I encountered will contribute to expand our understanding of “love migration” and to grasp the complexities of this phenomenon. In terms of conjugal status, at the time of our interview, 10 participants were married to the partners they migrated for, while 2 were in common-law or conjugal relationships, 1 participant was legally single but cohabitating with her partner in Canada, and the remaining 2 were divorced or estranged from their partners. I will discuss the predominance of marriage in this sample in Chapter 2, but for now it is important to point out that: a) marriage was the main migration route for the love migrants I interviewed, and b) not all women took the “marriage option” as their migration route. Another key point is sexuality: while 13 women migrated for heterosexual relationships, 2 moved to Canada for a same-sex relationship. This is an interesting finding since most love migration studies have tended to exclude same-sex relationships from their work, which
points to a heteronormative approach to romantic relationships within these migration studies. Finally, the nationality of partners was distributed as follows: 8 women migrated for Canadian partners (in all cases ethnically identified as white), 4 for Mexican partners, and 3 for partners of other national origins (French, Moroccan, Salvadorian) but who had settled in Canada as temporary or permanent residents, or had acquired Canadian citizenship. It is important to highlight the diversity of partnerships because often migration studies have analyzed couples with the same nationality separately from those who have different national origins, something that Williams (2010, 9) also critiques in her research on marriage migration. This separation is perhaps due to the view that same-nationality relationships and binational relationships do not encounter the same challenges of migration. And while this might be in part true, in this thesis I will show that, despite some important differences, women in these relationships share some migration experiences that we need to address.
CHAPTER 2: LOVE STORIES

“Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice.”
— Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday life

The migration stories of the women I interviewed start with a love story. More specifically, our conversations began with the question of how they met their partners. In response, the participants told unique and very personal narratives about incidentally meeting the men and women who would become their partners, establishing a friendship and falling in love, and the decision to migrate in order to continue the relationship. As I will show here, their migrations revolve around romance and intimacy. Looking closer, I found that autonomy and self-fulfillment were central themes in their narratives: they were essential aspects in the construction of a future, but so was their wish to have a romantic partner with whom to share that future. At the same time, their relationships developed amidst processes of transnationalism and global interconnectedness. As Aybek et al. (2015, 3) argue, nowadays it is not possible to talk about a simplified push-pull model of migration; instead, we need to recognize that increasingly micro-level decisions—like the desire for intimacy—can intersect with macro-level conditions—such as transnationalism, globalization, and nation-state borders. Thus, to understand the motivations of the Mexican women I interviewed, it is imperative to discuss how they formed their relationships, because this context reveals the expectations and hopes they had when they decided to transport their lives to Canada.

Accordingly, I begin this chapter by outlining the particularities of the social context that informed the emotions and intimate decisions of the women in this study. I discuss the “place” that women have historically occupied in Mexican society, which is strongly attached to the patriarchal family, and the social changes that have given them more autonomy and control to negotiate their roles within this society. In the second section, I present eight of the fifteen love stories I collected for this study. I highlight the main aspects of the process of
going from an unexpected romantic encounter to the decision to migrate to Canada. In the last section, I analyze the participants’ stories to show how autonomy and romantic love encouraged these women to migrate in order to find a fulfilling future in Canada with their partners.

**Women’s “place” in Mexican society**

Over the last four decades, Mexican women have gained greater autonomy and freedom of choice over life decisions such as their education, profession, and intimate relationships. In previous centuries, women’s “place” in Mexican society had been determined by a patriarchal social structure revolving around the family and attached to the Catholicism that came with the Spanish conquest. Nevertheless, the arrival of industrialization in the first decades of the twentieth century produced important social changes—including a process of individualization—which allowed for the liberation of women from traditional gender roles. Despite the changes, as I will show here, family continues to be a central aspect of Mexican women’s lives: it has become a social pressure and a desire. As a result, Mexican women have recurred to a process of what scholar Daniel Nehring (2014) calls a “negotiated familism.” Although the social changes that I discuss below are true for Mexican women in all levels of society, these changes have been more evident in the middle classes where women tend to “combine home and work [duties]” and for whom “work represents a choice of personal development rather than a pressing economic need” (Rojas 2014, 95).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a rigid division of labor emerged in Mexico which ultimately placed women in the household. While in previous centuries women had been involved in labour through handcrafting, the introduction of large factories and new technologies around the 1900s required predominantly male labour, which resulted in the elimination of most women from the workforce (Esteinou 2014, 40). Women, in turn, redirected their energies to the home, where they became mainly “wives, mothers and
homemakers,” while men remained “husbands, fathers and breadwinners,” a division of labor that persisted until the 1980s (LeVine 1993, 22). Paired with these changes, the Catholic church took the opportunity to distribute propaganda that promoted a morality based on a patriarchal division of labor, and which advised women how to be “perfect” models of femininity by dedicating themselves fully to their fathers, husbands, and children. The gender roles that the Catholic Church promoted, paired with the shortages in female labor ultimately created two narratives of the Mexican woman: the “faithful, devoted wife” and the “devoted, self-sacrificing mother” (Esteinou 2014, 40; Messinger Cypess 2005, 16). From that moment, women’s “place” became not only the household, but the ideal of a morally-correct, caring, and hard-working wife and mother.

After the 1970s, important social and economic changes took place which began a process of liberalization of women from the household. For instance, the government’s attraction of foreign investment through manufacturing plants and tourist locations increased the demand for female work (Nehring et al 2014, 16). Women were thus able to re-integrate in the labor market, some out of necessity and others after pursuing professional education. Access to schools was another important change during these decades. While education had been a right since 1917, women’s presence in schools became more constant in the 1990s, when middle-school education became compulsory for all children. During this period, Mexico also saw a series of social movements—including feminist and women’s rights movements—which encouraged women in the lower and middle classes to ask for recognition of their specific struggles, as well as to demand sexual and reproductive rights (25). Through these movements, women were able to bring attention to the barriers and limitations they faced, especially as they found themselves dividing their efforts between tending to their families and their obligations at school and/or work.
A definitive game-changer was the economic crisis that hit Mexico in the 1980s. The crisis mostly affected the middle and lower classes in urban and rural areas, which resulted in mass migrations of mainly men to the United States (Nehring et al 2014, Esteinou 2014). The shortage of male labor not only increased the demand for female workers, but women also took on the role of providers after their husbands’ migrations. Consequently, working women became the rule rather than the exception. The domestic sphere also underwent some reconfiguration: the categories of “homemaker” and “breadwinner” were no longer rigid. With greater access to education, employment became a “rite of passage” that allowed women to “escape isolation in the home” (Shaeffer-Grabel 2004, 35). In other words, women no longer saw themselves following the traditional trajectory from marriage to motherhood to domestic life (Rojas 2014, 95). Instead, they redefined their roles within the family; although, as Esteinou argues (2014, 49) “not in a radical way.”

**Individualization and negotiation of roles within the family**

With the arrival of industrialization, the influence of globalization, and the newly acquired culture of consumption, Mexican society underwent a process of individualization that mostly affected people in urban areas. As with other Western societies, this individualization meant moving away from the community to focus on the “I” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 24). Men and women were encouraged to “build up a *life of their own* by way of the labour market, training and mobility, and if needed be to pursue this life at the cost of their commitments to family, relations and friends” (6). For Mexican middle-class women, individualization came hand in hand with their liberation. Their integration into education and labor made them less reliant on men to support themselves, and more focused on their life as a personal project. However, unlike other societies, Mexican women upheld the desire to play an active role within their families, and finding a life partner became part of their life project. Yet, unlike earlier generations, after the 1980s, marriage and motherhood became
choices for these women: they could now decide more freely whether they wanted to become wives and/or mothers or not, the timing of the decision, and they could more easily divorce to escape unhappy marriages (Shaeffer-Grabiel 2004, 35; Nehring 2005, 224). In other words, there was no clear break from the family as the theories of individualization sustain; instead, women reconfigured their roles within the family but did not fully abandon them. Daniel Nehring (2011, 183) has called this phenomenon “negotiated familism.”

The term “familism” refers to societies where the specific responsibilities and obligations associated with the family are placed above individual interests and personal development (Ingoldsby 1991, 57). In Mexico, family occupies a central place as a community of identity and belonging; however, it follows a patriarchal structure that is “connected, in part, to particular interpretations of Catholicism” (Nehring 2005, 224). In academia, the concept of familism usually refers to a social “collectivity” that stands in opposition to the “individuality” that appeared after urbanization (2011, 168). However, in Mexico, Nehring (2014) found that, rather than a complete switch from familism to individualization, young women in Mexico City managed to sustain aspects of both through what the author calls a “negotiated familism.” Accordingly, negotiated familism refers to a strategy whereby Mexican women attempt to balance their attachment to family and desire for a long-term romantic partner with the conviction of living an independent and self-fulfilling life (2014, 118). Although Nehring admits that the scope of his theory of negotiated familism is limited to his research area in Mexico City, it is a concept that we must keep in mind when discussing Mexican women’s modern construction of intimate relationships.

**Machismo**

Despite the social changes I have outlined above, Mexican women continue to encounter resistance to their liberation and autonomy; specifically, through experiences with machismo.
Machismo is a widely-used term in Latin America which refers to male power but also to the particularities of the patriarchal family structure. In Mexico, its meaning oscillates between the idea that men should be “strong enough to protect and support [the family]” and a “hierarchical male dominance” (Anzaldúa 2007, 105; Gutmann 2007, 241). Machismo exists in a variety of forms, but it mainly manifests through violence of various degrees that targets women. Feminist writers consider that machismo-related violence not only asserts male dominance over women (Lagarde 2005), but it also serves to relegate women back into an unequal “place” by “[reproducing] the historical subordination to which they have been subjected” (Flores Pérez 2014, 75). Women in Mexico experience this kind of violence in public spaces like streets, schools, workplaces; however, it is more frequently present in the privacy of the domestic and intimate spaces. In fact, the Mexican National Institute for Women found that 63% of women 15 years old and above living in Mexico have suffered some kind of violence throughout their lives and, in most cases, their romantic partners were the perpetrators (INMUJERES 2017). The violence can range from disregard toward a woman’s aspirations, discrimination at work and school, insults, harassment, emotional and economic manipulation, to physical violence and murder. The reality of machismo in Mexican women’s lives has led Nehring to observe that negotiated familism is also a strategy for women to challenge the “machismo and patriarchal traditions of previous generations while simultaneously emphasizing their desire for strong family ties” (2011, 189). While Mexican women have become increasingly active decision-makers in the construction of their lives, a tension exists between the liberation they have acquired in recent years and the patriarchal structures that persist around them. Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde argues that the modern lifestyle and traditional patriarchal structures have created an antagonism that “often produces deep internal conflicts in women. And living becomes an art of solving the contradictions, paradoxes, and antagonisms that spring from the gender
syncretism that marks each and every single one of us. It is an art that requires many skills” (2001, 16). In the midst of this social context the participants in this study met their partners, fell in love, and decided to migrate.

**Eight love stories: From romantic encounters to love migrations**

In this section I introduce some of the love stories I collected for this study. Because of space constraints, I will only look at eight of the fifteen stories. However, I have selected the ones that best represent the diversity of voices as well as the recurrent themes I found in this sample. My intention here is twofold: firstly, I highlight some of the elements that played a role in the formation of the participants’ romantic relationships. Secondly, as we will see, each story is unique and personal; therefore, it is important to recognize the diversity of romantic relationships and emotions that motivated these Mexican women to migrate to Canada. At the same time, I want to clarify that, in presenting the participants’ love stories, my aim is neither to judge nor to question their personal feelings and motivations; instead, the goal is to showcase some of the ways in which these women went from romantic encounters to love migrations.

**Ana**

Ana met her Canadian partner Eliot around 2009 through an online application. She cannot recall the name or purpose of the app, but she remembers that Eliot added her as a friend and they started writing to each other daily. Ana decided to respond to Eliot’s messages because

We were so different: he told me it had snowed that day and I was like “wow, so cool!” because I’d never seen the snow, right? So, I liked his stories of “I had to go out and shovel the snow.” For me it was interesting … Never in my life had I talked to people, well, at least I had never talked to a person that lived here [in Canada].

When they met, Ana explained she had no romantic intentions because, among other things, she was already in a romantic relationship with another man. Instead, the frequent conversations with Eliot “turned into a beautiful friendship,” where they would care for each
other from the distance, asking about each other’s lives and routines. Almost a year after meeting, Eliot suggested visiting Ana in Mexico. However, Ana felt conflicted because she thought her boyfriend would disapprove of the visit; and indeed he decided to end the relationship. On the day of Eliot’s expected arrival, Ana thought that it was all part of a prank, or that “maybe he was a serial killer or something;” however, Eliot did arrive and they finally met in person:

[Eliot] met my family, he met my brother, my mother and everyone and we got along super well, and that’s when the relationship started. And he told me, “hey, wouldn’t you like to live in Canada so we can be together?” And the truth is that I didn’t, like at the beginning I didn’t want to because I had my life [in Mexico], my entire life … I’m a dentist, so [in Mexico] I had my office, I was just setting up my clinic and I had my first patients, so I was scared to come and not know, well, what I would face. Later I found out that I could do some exams and become a dentist [in Canada]. It sounded so easy … So, I decided to come.

During our interview, Ana emphasized several times that she had an “entire life” in Mexico: not only her work as a dentist and her own business, but a close relationship with her family and a large group of friends. What worried her most about leaving Mexico was “becoming a nobody. I would have to study and then do the exam and, what if I didn’t pass it?” When I asked what motivated her to leave Mexico despite her concerns, she replied:

Why not try? I mean, I’ve always been the kind of person that says “yes, yes.” I’m not scared. … So, I decided to do it because, number one, [Eliot] was a good person, to be honest. I made a list: he was a good person, peaceful, he was nice to me, he said he would support me here until I found something to do, a job and everything. So, I said to myself: “well, I mean, what else do I want? It’s true that all my family and my work and everything is here, but it is from small opportunities like this that make people achieve things.”

Ana added that Eliot was a great choice of partner because the way he treated her was very different from her previous experiences with romantic partners:

My previous relationships had been with machos. They liked drinking, they wanted to be with you one day and the next no. I didn’t like that. And when I met [Eliot] it was like, well, his culture is totally different. I mean, it’s like they are raised to be self-sufficient, to not depend on women, to not be machos, obviously. Well, I can’t generalize, you know? Because I haven’t met all the men in Canada, but at least [Eliot] is like that. He’s not a macho, he doesn’t get jealous. You know how in Mexico men get jealous, very jealous.

Ana felt she had accepted Mexican men’s behaviours as normal. She said she was used to letting men make the decisions in the relationship and she would respect that; however, she also felt there needed to be some balance and mutual respect. Ana explained that, after
meeting Eliot and finding him to be “so different,” she realized that “men in Mexico are like that [machos], but not everyone is the same and they shouldn’t be.” Thus, Eliot’s behavior was one of the main factors in her decision to leave Mexico and move with him to Canada: “You put things on a scale and say, ‘OK, he has this, this and this. OK, I’m moving super far away, but I’m going to be happy! I mean, we’re going to be OK, and what do I stay here for, you know? To find more of the same? No.’”

Daniela

Daniela met her Mexican partner Carlos in her classroom in high school. Although Daniela did not detail how the relationship started, she remembers that during the three years of high school, she and Carlos had a “beautiful” relationship:

We were together all the time. He had super nice details, for example, every morning he would wait for me to go to school … and after school he would also take me home, he would call me. We had similar taste in music, so we talked about that a lot. … and he would say things like “oh, you’re so beautiful, you’re very different to all the others”—to all the girls that wanted to be with him. And I felt, well, in the moon.

After high school, Daniela and Carlos decided to break up because, as she explained “I became interested in other things and he became less of a priority.” Instead she focused on starting a university degree in nursing. One day, while she was still in university, she remembers attending a presentation by an organization dedicated to relocating nurses to countries like the United States, Canada, Spain, and Australia. They offered great incentives to move abroad and the option of bringing a partner or family to the new country. Daniela considered applying to the program, and because at that point she did not have a romantic partner, she thought of taking her parents and younger brother with her. According to Daniela, this was an opportunity to combine her passion for her profession with an international experience. When I asked what attracted her about living abroad, she explained:

I think the idea of a life change, getting to know what it’s like to be in a different country. I don’t know, being able to say, and I know it sounds wrong, but saying “you see? I can leave the normality in which we live. I can do other things in another country.” It was that: doing something different.
Not long after attending the presentation, Daniela’s parents went through a difficult divorce, and she abandoned the idea of moving abroad altogether.

Close to completing her degree, Daniela and Carlos met for the first time in years. During the meeting, Daniela’s feelings for Carlos re-emerged, and very soon they decided to start a romantic relationship again. Around the time of the reencounter, Daniela was also going through a period of housing and emotional instability due to problems related to her parent’s divorce. Carlos suggested to start living together and to consider an eventual marriage. Daniela agreed and they moved in together. She remembers the initial months of their life together were joyful, spending time with each other and making a home together; until one day, things changed: Carlos started to become distant and unwelcoming. Not long after, to Daniela’s dismay, Carlos announced he was leaving Mexico to settle permanently in Canada. According to Daniela, Carlos had felt intrigued and tempted to move to Canada for years. Yet, the news of his move took her by surprise:

I was disappointed and angry because I felt it was a decision he took alone. ... When he arrived with passport in hand, to me it was like “when did you include me in your plan? We already had other plans, so why am I not in this one?” I asked him “what will happen to me?” and he said “well, I don’t know, I mean, finish your degree and we’ll see.” It was an intense moment, but honestly at that point I loved him so much that I said, “I’m angry, but I think I can deal with this.”

After Carlos departed, for a year, they maintained regular communication over Skype and Daniela visited him in Canada once. Their frequent online interactions and the fact that she was living with Carlos’ parents kept the relationship alive. Nevertheless, in his communications, he seemed disinterested in the relationship. During that year, Daniela also focused on completing her nursing degree so she could leave Mexico with credentials to practice her profession in Canada. Once she graduated, she excitedly informed Carlos so they could plan her move. Nevertheless, he was not convinced and asked her to wait. Daniela waited three more months, until she delivered an ultimatum:
Looking back, Daniela reflected on the emotions of her decision and concluded that, on the one hand, she wanted to move to Canada because she wanted to find out why Carlos stopped being the loving partner he had been during the most part of their relationship. On the other hand, she explained that her feelings for him had given her the courage to do something she had always dreamed of but had not dared to do on her own:

I think it was a good option to have such a strong love [for Carlos] that pulled me out of my country, because, as I said, I had already thought about [leaving Mexico], but maybe I didn’t have the courage to go out and fulfill that dream. I needed something stronger to pull me out of my comfort zone and live other experiences because, otherwise, I would’ve stayed in Mexico to, I don’t know, do what we all do: have a career, get married, have kids, and all that.

Paired with her dreams of moving out of the “normality” of her life in Mexico, Daniela imagined that, in Canada, she and Carlos would build a happy future together: “I thought … we were going to be together and happy in another country. That we were going to explore everything in [Canada] together, and we were going to plan for a family. … that we were going to build a life from scratch.”

Frida

Frida met her French partner Luc through a pen pal program when she was in high school. At school, the French teacher noticed Frida’s skill and passion for the language; thus, the teacher offered to sign Frida into a program where she could exchange emails with people in France and improve her writing and reading skills. Frida accepted the offer and soon received an email address to start exchanging messages. The first person she wrote to happened to be Luc, a university student living in France. Over the following months, Frida and Luc went from writing a few emails to each other, to a close friendship because, as Frida explained, rather than just grammar, they would discuss each other’s lives, and in the process, they discovered there was affinity between the two:
He loves travelling and I also—well, at that point I hadn’t travelled much, but I had the idea that after [school], well, I’m from a family with parents who are, well, my mum is very Catholic, very religious, and very conservative and she was very strict with me. I was annoyed about it and I used to think “no, it’s enough! One day I’m leaving, I mean, I’m going to discover the world on my own.” So, there was the internal motivation of saying, well, “if I have a contact somewhere else, maybe one day I’ll be able to travel more easily,” but it was also the connection of personalities, that we were very similar and the conversation would just flow.

Being the eldest of five children, Frida grew up with her parents’ expectation that she would become economically and professionally successful by earning a degree, that she would take over her father’s company, and, as Frida put it, that she would remain “tied to my family.” In contrast, Frida described herself as a creative and artistic person who saw herself travelling. I used to say: “I will backpack around Europe and see all the countries. I will see the world on my own,” because, well, in [my city] I think there are a lot of people with money and I feel like people are too concerned with appearances … and it is a huge social pressure. … I also attended a private Catholic school and obviously at school people focused on appearances, and they wanted to graduate from high school in order to marry a rich person that would pay for them for the rest of their lives. That was the type of people around me and I was tired of them. I wanted to finish [school] to do whatever I wanted because my goal was to finish university and tell my parents: “I’ve fulfilled your expectations, now it’s my decision and, well, see you later [laughs], I’ll visit you later.” So, I don’t know, that was the pressure I lived with.

Aside from these experiences at home and at school, Frida mentioned that her previous romantic partner was also not supportive of the independent life she imagined herself living:

[My previous partner] was always kind, he never offended me but, well, I feel he was more like, instead of us being at the same level, he would be like “oh, you’re a woman.” … It was maybe this slightly macho attitude that we still experience in the Mexican society today. It wasn’t so bad because, well, he was born in this generation, I mean, he’s my age. But still … he had attitudes like “oh no, women don’t, um, you won’t work. When we get married, you will stay at home, you will stop working” or things like that that for me, I don’t know, were attempts to control my life and limit me when I didn’t want to limit myself.

While Frida tried to balance needs and expectations, she spent one year exchanging emails with Luc, and a second year interacting through voice calls. When they switched to videocalls, Frida remembers the excitement of seeing Luc face to face. However, they did not call frequently because of the seven-hour time difference between Mexico and France. By the time Frida started a university degree in fashion design, Luc decided to move to Canada for a working holiday. With Luc’s change of location, they were able to communicate every day, and to develop a more intimate relationship:

Every night we would talk for hours on Skype … And when I couldn’t talk, I felt like my day was not, like my routine wasn’t, that my day wasn’t normal! I mean, I felt like something was
missing and I think at that point I realized that I was falling for someone that wasn’t physically with me, but who, I don’t know, who was present because … he knew everything about my life.

In the interview, Frida reflected on what it was like to fall in love for a person she had only met virtually.

I feel the connection is more intense, or truer because you like him for his personality and for how he talks to you and what he says and not because of how he dresses or because you find him attractive. … When you meet a person online and you start exchanging ideas or preferences or mundane topics … and you find that “oh! He likes to do the same things that I like or he wants the same as me or he shares my ideals,” then, I don’t know, it’s more honest.

Three years after they started exchanging emails, Luc suggested travelling to Mexico to meet in person. On the day they met, Frida commented that they made an instant “click.” As a result, they started a long-distance romantic relationship that they maintained mostly through online interactions. Luc visited a second time, and the relationship became more serious as Frida’s family got to know him better. At that point, Frida became convinced that she wanted to move to Canada with him and “test” the relationship. She explained how the idea of moving to Canada came to be:

While I was in university, [Luc] asked me “what do you think if, when you’re done, well, if you like the idea, you can come and live with me so you see this place?” because I’d never been to Canada … so, he said, “you can see if you like it and see if, I don’t know, you are comfortable and you integrate and things work [between us].” So, we had planned it out but I wanted to finish [university] to tell my parents “it’s done, I’ve studied, I’ve done what you asked so you can be happy that I got an education. Now it’s my decision what to do next.”

When Frida delivered the news that she was moving to Canada, her parents were shocked. Frida’s mother was especially resistant to the idea, and so Frida’s departure was preceded by constant arguments and fights with her mother. Yet, seeing Frida’s determination to leave, both parents extended their blessing and support before she left. When she agreed to Frida’s departure, her father wondered if the economic situation in Mexico had motivated her decision, but Frida reflected that her decision was “more my desire to discover [something new] and to say: ‘if I mess up, it is my fault, but at least I tried.’”

Liliana
Liliana met her Canadian partner Matt online through a mutual friend. When they met, Liliana was living in Cancun working as lawyer, while Matt travelled regularly to that beach town and was planning to open a charity there. A friend introduced them via email so Liliana could help Matt with some legal translations and advice to open his charity in Cancun. Consequently, they spent several weeks exchanging emails related to work. In the midst of their work interactions, the conversation turned friendly and soon they discovered they had many things in common, including their favorite book:


[Matt] was surprised. He said: “how come you’re reading a book, you’re a lawyer reading a book about self-improvement, theology, psychology” … From then on, we started talking, talking, and talking and we became friends. Once we finished working together, there was already a friendship and then we moved on to more intimate conversations like “what do you do? Do you live alone or are you married, do you have a partner?” … the typical questions, right?

In our interview, Liliana described herself as being “not the typical Mexican woman who has to be married and living four blocks away from her parents.” Instead, she explained that she was the first to move away from her parents’ home, to be far from her family, and to divorce and dedicate her life to her career. In her previous marriage, Liliana suffered physical and emotional violence, and, after years of abuse, her ex-husband took their daughter away and Liliana was unable to see her for close to fifteen years. After leaving her ex-husband, Liliana took some years to recover and eventually decided to move to Cancun and pursue a career in law as a way to rebuild her life after the traumatic marriage experience. In Cancun, Liliana became a successful and busy lawyer. During those years, she also became pregnant again, and seeing that she was economically self-sufficient and stable, she decided to become a single mother. She remembers that, in order to balance her busy work schedule and constant work trips with life as a mother, her parents helped by looking after her baby daughter. Because they were living in a different city, Liliana’s parents travelled frequently to visit Liliana, and occasionally took the baby with them to their city. Matt, on the other hand, was a widower and a divorcee from previous marriages, and had children from those relationships.
Seeing some similarities between their experiences with romance, Liliana felt they were very compatible:

> [Matt and I] were two people who liked working and helping others but, at the same time, we were alone. So, we kept each other company. … And that was it, we talked and counselled each other, so to speak [laughs]. That’s when we realized that we were compatible and we both fell in love. Two people who didn’t believe in marriage, who had already experienced other relationships … Telling each other our [experiences] made us start thinking “well, not everyone is bad, right? We’re good people, we deserve to give each other a chance,” and why not.

After spending months interacting mostly through videocalls, Matt planned a trip to Mexico to meet Liliana in person for the first time. When they saw each other at the airport, Liliana described feeling “an electric shock.” From that moment, they began a romantic relationship that continued long-distance. During a second trip to Mexico, Matt proposed marriage to Liliana; however, he asked her to visit Canada first and see with her own eyes his place and life before accepting the proposal. Soon after, Liliana flew to Canada with her baby daughter to a small town in Ontario, far from big cities and closer to nature. During the trip, Liliana and her daughter met Matt’s family and friends, and she had a glimpse at Matt’s routine and work as a church leader. After the trip to Canada, Liliana accepted the proposal and started to prepare for her departure, including planning the day of their civil marriage in Canada, finishing her work commitments, and bidding farewell to friends and family. When I asked Liliana how she imagined her life in Canada, she answered that she had no expectations, as she felt she could not control the future that awaited them. Yet, she felt ready to leave her job and move on to a new chapter in her life because “it was time. It was time to say ‘I’ve given what I had to give but, for me, my family is more important than my work. I won’t sacrifice my family for work. Work might bring some satisfaction, but it’s not everything.”

Emilia

Emilia first met her Quebecois partner Camille at a wellbeing house in a beach town in Mexico. The house, as Emilia explained, was a spiritual retreat for the terminally ill; thus, patients, staff and volunteers lived together in the house “as a sort of family.” Camille arrived
in the community after receiving an invitation to join as a volunteer; During our interview, Emilia could not recall the exact details of how they started the romantic relationship, because several decades have elapsed since they first met; however, Emilia explained that, as a manager, she had to interact with everyone in the house, including the volunteers like Camille. Emilia admitted that, initially, there were some communication barriers because Emilia spoke little English and no French, while Camille only spoke French. Nevertheless, in the next three months, their interactions became more intimate and romantic.

One day, after spending a couple of months in the house, Camille had to urgently return to Canada and look after her mother. Since Camille was not able to return to Mexico due to her mother’s condition, in the months following her departure, she contacted Emilia and invited her to visit Canada:

[Camille] is semi-retired so she said “I don’t know when I’ll be back. If you can, come and visit me, that way you can see Canada.” I arrived here in the summer, end of summer. I stayed for two months because I couldn’t leave my job for longer … And that’s how it all started. At the same time, I still wasn’t convinced that this was the relationship or that this was it. … maybe because I, I don’t know, I had never thought about it [being in a relationship with a foreigner] and probably because of the cultural differences that started weighing on us later.

During the visit, Emilia remembers a difficult encounter with Camille’s mother, because the mother did not approve of Camille’s sexual orientation nor with the fact that her partner was Mexican. Despite the tension, Emilia did not take the incidents to heart because, she explained, she felt she was old enough to understand that her relationship was with Camille and not with the mother-in-law. After spending two months in Canada, Emilia and Camille returned together to Mexico and, this time, they settled in a Buddhist community located in another part of Mexico. They lived together for the following two years.

When I asked Emilia at what point she realized they were having a serious relationship, she compared her relationship with Camille with the experiences of her previous partners. Emilia had been in what she described as a “tormenting” and “painful” relationship with a woman fifteen years younger, in which there was “a lot of insecurity on her side, a lot
of harassment, and jealousy. And I was over that, I had already gone through that stage of my life, so it was exhausting.” Instead, when she met Camille, Emilia explained she was looking for

Stability. Stability and understanding, and no jealousy because I was over that. … I mean, I wasn’t thinking of rebuilding a relationship with anyone or anything, but if I expected something, it was that. Something calmer, more understanding, more reliability, more support rather than passion and craziness, right? Because I’d had enough of that.

After living together for two years in Mexico, Camille had to return to Canada to look after her mother whose health was declining. As a result, Camille advised Emilia to start considering moving with her to Canada because it was uncertain how long she would have to take care of her mother. Because as a tourist Emilia could only stay in Canada for six months, Camille offered to sponsor her through the family reunification program (see Chapter 2).

When I asked Emilia what motivated her decision to move to Canada to live with Camille, she responded:

There was a thing of moral commitment. One of those unspoken things, what we call—, there’s something called the social contract, and I think another part is the family contract, the, um, couple’s contract, that it’s there, that tells you that if you really want to make your life with that person, it is implicit [that you should be there for them] … So, for me [the idea of leaving] came without a real reflection. It just happened.

Tania

Tania met her Moroccan partner Farid while she attended language school in Montreal. After completing high school, Tania’s father suggested that she take a gap year and learn English and French in Europe while she decided her career path. During the planning of the trip, a travel agent suggested Montreal as a place where Tania could learn both languages. Some months later, Tania arrived in Montreal and started her language course. At school, Tania remembers noticing Farid, although they were in different classrooms, so they had never formally met each other. It was during a party organized by mutual friends that they finally met. In their initial encounter, they only exchanged Facebook contacts and there was no real friendship. Yet, some months later they coincided at another party and, after this second
meeting, they began talking regularly through Facebook chat:

Every day, I would come home at 8 in the evening and go online and stay there talking to [Farid] until 3 a.m. Around that time, [Farid] left the school, so I didn’t see him, but we talked a lot … We met sometimes to go out together with friends, but nothing romantic yet. It was [three months later] that he asked me “do you want to be my girlfriend?” You know, his declaration of love [laughs], and at that point we started going out as a couple.

Although Farid later confessed he had been interested in Tania since they first met, looking back, Tania considers it was best that they spent several months chatting and getting to know each other because “if we had only dated, nothing would’ve happen. [When he declared his love] we both trusted each other, we were very comfortable, so to speak, with each other.”

For the remainder of her one-year stay in Canada, Tania continued the romantic relationship with Farid, thinking it was a “summer love” that would end once she returned to Mexico. She explained that, rather than wanting to remain in Canada after finishing her course, she already had other plans laid out:

I had my entire life practically [planned]. I would return [to Mexico], study university, I would go to France for another school exchange. So, I had my life planned out. I knew what was coming and what I wanted to do. In my mind, there was no room for a relationship and least of all for a marriage. … I was going to study tourism … my father found a course for me in England. I was going to London after [Montreal] and, well, I knew I was going somewhere else. … After that, my father wanted me to continue studying French and, you know, do what some girls do of travelling as nannies. That was my plan, apply to that and see what the future held.

When she returned to Mexico, Tania said that she felt “extremely sad” about parting ways with Farid. In spite of the distance, they both agreed to continue the relationship long-distance and see where it took them. The following year, Tania convinced her parents to let her visit Farid in Canada, to which they reluctantly agreed. After visiting Farid, Tania tried to convince her parents to pay for her studies in a university in Montreal; but after a long discussion and some disagreements, she missed the deadline to apply to schools in Montreal and London, and, as a result, she stayed in Mexico where she started a university degree in tourism. While Tania re-organized her life and focused on her studies, Farid was applying for a permanent residence in Canada and, therefore, could not leave the country. For over two
years, they maintained a long-distance relationship that consisted for the most part of online interactions, as well as Tania’s frequent visits to Canada. Tania believes their virtual interactions were essential to building a strong romantic relationship:

We spent a lot of time texting and sending photos. I didn’t feel a great absence because [Farid] was present at each moment of my life. Things like, “oh, I’m eating! Look what I’m eating” and I would send [a photo], and he would do the same … It wasn’t something that only happened at night, or that he would just call me once a day. No, we were in touch all the time, every day.

During one of Tania’s visits to Canada, she and Farid decided to get married. Tania explained they came with the idea of getting married during a conversation where there was “no romance,” but they considered the options to continue developing their relationship in physical proximity because, she explained, “otherwise, what was the point? We were not going to stay like this, separated for the rest of our lives.” When she announced the news of the engagement to her family, Tania’s parents were surprised, and their main concerns were: firstly, that she was marrying a Muslim man they had never met; however, they accepted him as a future member of the family once they met him in person. Secondly, Tania’s parents were worried that she would have to drop out of school in order to move to Canada:

The only thing my mum didn’t want was that I get married without finishing university. For my parents that has always been the most important, and my father also felt hurt when he found out that I would have to drop out of school. I assured them however I could that those were only fears. … I also really wanted to finish university.

After her parents agreed to Tania’s marriage, the preparations started for a civil marriage that could allow Tania to move to Canada (see Chapter 2). Thinking about the proposal that led to her migration, Tania reflected:

All my life I thought “oh no, marrying at a young age? Never, never!” and see, I ended up doing it. It’s true! I married at 21 and took the decision to marry at 19.

Researcher: Did you hesitate at any point?

T: No, never. Once we decided to marry, it was decided, period. There was never something like giving each other time or anything. No.

R: And what motivated you to say “yes” even when you didn’t want to marry at a young age?
T: That I loved him. That’s it.

Sandra

Sandra met her Salvadorian-Canadian partner Paty during a summer trip to Montreal. Sandra was in the middle of her university degree when she decided to take a trip to Canada to visit her sister who had been living in Montreal for some years. In the first week of her three-month visit, Sandra left her sister’s home to explore the city on her own. While she was on the bus, she felt slightly disoriented and lost, so she decided to ask for directions. She noticed one of the women in the bus looked Hispanic, and decided to talk to her, although first in English. The woman was able to help and she introduced herself as Paty; the conversation soon switched to Spanish. Sandra recalls with excitement the moment of this first encounter:

I was very excited, right? Not because I felt attracted to [Paty], but simply because I felt lost. Actually, in the past I had never had a relationship with a woman nor did I feel attracted to women. I’d had some boyfriends and everything. I mean, there was no attraction in that first moment. … Nor was I in [Canada] with the intention of meeting absolutely anyone. It’s simply part of destiny, you never know who you’re going to fall in love with.

The conversation continued until they found out that Paty was living close to Sandra’s sister; hence, they decided to exchange phone numbers and meet before Sandra’s departure.

Over the next days, Sandra contacted Paty and they spent most of Sandra’s stay enjoying the attractions of Montreal. They spent weeks getting to know each other and becoming close friends. Paty also met Sandra’s sister and mother—who had just arrived to visit—while Sandra met Paty’s family. A “beautiful” friendship ensued because, as Sandra explained, they had a good connection and she felt as if they had “been friends for years.” Three months after meeting, on the night before Sandra’s departure, she received a gift and a letter from Paty, and the gesture produced a change in their relationship:

Everything had been as friends, you understand? I mean, there was no physical connection, or anything about wanting each other, or anything. But that night it was special. She gave me [the letter] and I started reading it and I liked what she wrote—she had written about our friendship—but there was something different. I mean, it’s like there was a different connection.
of friendship. I felt weird. I mean, I said “what’s going on?” and it wasn’t what she had written on the letter, simply the connection! I don’t know, it was a really cool connection.

After she had returned to Mexico, the friendship grew through the emails they exchanged and, on the same year they met, Sandra suggested Paty to spend Christmas in Mexico together. Paty gladly accepted the idea, and in the next months she made a trip to Mexico where the relationship turned romantic. After the first time they kissed and had a sexual interaction, Sandra recalls feeling conflicted: she was enjoying the erotic and emotional closeness she and Patty were developing, but felt equally guilty due to her religious upbringing. Nevertheless, they continued being intimate for the remainder of Paty’s stay. On the day of Paty’s departure, Sandra recalls feeling distraught:

I cried at the airport once [Paty] took off. I didn’t cry a lot because my mum was there. And the night she travelled back to Montreal, she called to tell me she had arrived, that everything had been OK with her flight, and I started crying, I mean, because I missed her so much and I felt so bad after she left and, and, I was all alone in my bedroom and everything reminded me of her and so I thought “fuck, I mean, what’s going on with me?” I thought “this is crazy.” [Paty] also cried and told me she missed me.

A few days after Paty’s departure, during a telephone conversation, they agreed to start a long-distance romantic relationship. As the relationship was just starting, both women agreed to keep their relationship secret from anyone.

For two years, the long-distance relationship continued with daily phone conversations and occasional visits to each other. Once Sandra completed her university degree in foreign trade and started writing her thesis, Paty began to ask what was going to happen between them as she no longer wanted to continue living apart. Thus, she made a suggestion that Sandra felt she was not ready to accept:

When [Paty] said “I’ll go to Mexico and leave everything.” I got scared because, it was so nice to hear it and wow! I felt like a peacock, but I got scared because I thought “fuck, that means making a life with you and my parents don’t know and I don’t even know if this is what I want.” … At that time, it also wasn’t acceptable to bring a same-sex partner or have same-sex marriage [in Mexico] as it is nowadays in Mexico City, Guadalajura and other states, because the law didn’t pass. … So, I told [Paty], “it’s going to be hard for you to come. I mean, how am I going to sort out your [immigration] papers? In Mexico, it’s impossible without getting married and all that, and [marriage] is not valid or allowed. … And how do I get you a work permit? I mean, I
don’t even know how to sort out any of this in Mexico.” I think it was going to be harder, so I told her “no.”

Instead, Sandra suggested they wait. She wanted to finish her thesis and get work experience in Mexico before deciding whether to move to Canada or not. After all, Sandra explained, “I was in university for four years, my parents paid my university education and I wasn’t going to go to another country and say ‘I didn’t even try in my country.’”

Two more years elapsed during which Sandra pursued career opportunities in Mexico. Her success with employment meant she moved out of her parents’ home and she relocated twice to other cities in Mexico. During one of Paty’s visits to Mexico, they again discussed the future of the relationship. This time, Sandra decided that she was ready to start looking into the process of immigrating to Canada as a skilled worker (see Chapter 2). Her plan was to move into her sister’s house in Montreal until she could secure a job and have financial stability. Because they were more concerned with Sandra’s move to Canada, neither Paty nor she discussed the idea of coming out to their families and moving in together once they were living in the same country. Despite the uncertainty of moving to Canada, this time Sandra felt confident about her decision. When I asked what convinced her to finally move, she explained that:

It was the love I felt for [Paty]. My love was so big that I said: “I’ll leave everything and go [to Canada].” Why? Because I had-, I was happy in Mexico, being on my own I had-, I was working in my area, I could grow, there were opportunities for [professional] growth. But, well, if you don’t have your other half with you and since I had already fallen in love, it was like something was missing. And it wasn’t nice to continue long-distance.

Raquel

More than thirty years ago, when Raquel was still in middle-school, she met her Mexican partner Marco outside of her home in Mexico. On that particular day, Raquel had been home with her family waiting for the electricity to come back after a power outage. Right in front of her home, Raquel heard some music. She decided to look out of the balcony to see who was playing, and she noticed Marco and his friends. When they saw Raquel, they invited her to
come down and join them. Raquel came down and, from that moment, a friendship started between her and Marco because of the music:

I love music, I like trio music and all that, it’s my weakness. So, as I said, [Marco and his friends] had a folk music band. And that’s how it started, with the music. Sometimes I would attend their performances and all that, and the two people I became friends with were [Marco] and [Pablo], another friend of his. The three of us became inseparable during the ten years that [Marco and I] were together, the three of us were inseparable.

Raquel and Marco’s friendship soon turned into a romantic relationship that initially lasted five years; until, one day, Raquel found out that Marco had married without telling her. Upon hearing the news she felt so devastated that she decided to keep Marco out of her life and concentrate on her work and studies. However, two months after breaking up, Marco found Raquel and they discussed what would happen to their romantic situation. They agreed that, even though Marco was not going to leave his wife, they would continue to be romantically involved but without an official commitment. Raquel said she accepted this arrangement because she had strong feelings for Marco, and she explained how their relationship underwent some changes:

Our relationship was pretty open. After [Marco] married, it was pretty open. We were clear and I didn’t take it the wrong way, nor did I feel bad because I was close to my family. I think that if I had been living alone, I would’ve felt strange whenever he didn’t visit me, but since I was so close to my family, I was always busy: I studied, worked, my mother owned a butchery … in the mornings I worked, in the evenings I studied … and on the weekends I worked at the butchery with my mother. So, I was very busy all the time. So, for me, the fact that he was married didn’t bother me and it didn’t interest me because, um, when I wanted company I had my sisters, or my friends, um, I had a lot of people around me.

Raquel’s life at home was another topic during our interview: she described living in a conservative household where, her father was a “dominant” man who expected his daughters to follow his rules to the letter, and her mother wanted to marry her daughters with the first man they met. Yet, Raquel always felt “the rebellious one” who did not agree with her parents’ views and did great efforts to follow her own life plans. Thus, rather than the married life her parents wanted her to have, she enjoyed her unofficial relationship with Marco because of the openness that, as she explained, made her feel free.
The relationship between Marco and Raquel continued intermittently for five more years. Raquel told me that there were periods when they would “get angry at each other” and she would decide to have other sentimental partners. On one of these occasions, Raquel met a man at work with whom she started a romantic relationship and, after a year, they got engaged. A few months before the wedding, Marco and their best friend Pablo contacted Raquel and asked to meet. Pablo explained that he and Marco were planning a trip to Canada and they wanted Raquel to come along. Their plan was to live and work in Canada for a year and then return to Mexico to continue with their lives. It took some time for Raquel to make sense of the proposal, as she was not expecting such a travel plan at that point in her life. Yet, she liked the idea and decided to quit her job, postpone her wedding, and join Marco and Pablo on the trip. When I asked Raquel what convinced her to join them despite the plans she already had for her life, she concluded:

Rather than coming [to Canada] just because, I came because of [Marco]. That’s it, because, as I told you, we had already considered this trip—not to Canada, to the United States—but it was a trip we had already planned; though it never happened. So, as I told you [Marco and I] broke up. And when he told me about the trip, well [sighs], I said: “I’m coming, I’m coming.” … It was what I’d dreamed of: being with him, coming here.

“Finding a future together”: analyzing love migrants’ love stories

The stories I presented above show a sample of the unique encounters that led to the decision to migrate. These women met partners while travelling or studying abroad, or in Mexico, in tourist places or in their places of everyday routine. Similarly, the women fell in love with Mexican and non-Mexican partners with whom they had already lived or with whom the relationship developed over long-distance. Keeping these differences in mind, in this section I will highlight the commonalities among the participants’ stories which relate to the social context that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. In sum, what the participants’ stories demonstrate is the wish to construct a fulfilling life where there is room for a loving partner with whom to share it.
Constructing an autonomous life

The women in this study talked about the desire to have autonomous lives. However, autonomy was a condition that they had to actively work towards and negotiate, particularly with their families. Throughout their narratives, the participants alluded to the close relationship they had with their families, and they described the family’s role as a community of care and belonging. The family not only served as an emotional and practical support, but it also encouraged these women to become economically independent and professionally fulfilled by completing at least an undergraduate university degree and finding meaningful work. In other words, the family could work as a compass that guided some of these women’s life decisions and actions. Some participants expressed their gratitude to their parents for having provided them with an education and for projecting great hopes for their futures. For this reason, women like Tania and Sandra explained that they felt an obligation to finish their school commitments and find work before moving to Canada, as a way to fulfil their parents’ expectations. LeVine (1993, 78) has pointed out that, since the 1980s, Mexican families actively encourage their girls and young women to study and work because “without ‘preparation’—the capacity to support herself economically—she [puts] herself at risk.” Thus, the family’s insistence that their daughters have a university degree can be interpreted as their way to protect these women from being trapped in unhappy romantic relationships.

Aside from serving as a community of care that encouraged women’s autonomy, the family also acted as a constraint to this autonomy. It could validate and control some of these women’s decisions. For instance, that same expectation to complete and education and find employment sometimes meant that the women had to prioritize their parents’ expectations over their personal preferences. The women, then, felt that they had to challenge the authority of the family. Women like Raquel and Frida described feeling “tired” of living in a strict household where there was immense pressure to follow the life path that their parents
determined. Raquel’s parents, for example, wanted her to become a wife who respected the authority of the man; however, she described herself as a “rebellious” person who was looking to “free” herself from that lifestyle. Frida’s parents, on the other hand, did not demand that Frida fulfil the traditional roles of the mother and wife; instead, they wanted her to focus completely on becoming a successful student, and to remain “tied” to the family by choosing a profession that would allow her to take over the family business. Other participants also explained how they challenged the family’s expectations by travelling, falling in love with one person or the other, and in general, questioning the family’s decisions and establishing their boundaries as an individual. One of the main ways to establish their individuality and autonomy was through professional education and employment.

Education and employment allowed the participants to express and reaffirm a sense of autonomy and give meaning to their lives. They described having busy routines which they divided between their activities as daughters—and, in some cases, as mothers—their studies and a job. Education represented an initial step toward emancipation from the family. Whether they lived with the expectation of fulfilling traditional gender roles within the family or not, the women in this study saw the prospect of a professional career as a way to become economically self-sufficient. As a woman living with her family prior to migrating, Frida, for example, completed a degree in order to challenge the strict upbringing she grew up with: “[I wanted] to tell my parents: ‘it’s done, I’ve studied ... now it’s my decision what to do next.” In other cases, education was a path to reconfigure or add value to their lives. After living through a traumatic first marriage, Liliana, for example, studied law and started a successful career on her own, away from her family and her hometown. For other participants, education was a means to increase their cultural capital and explore the world on their own. Some women in fact visited Canada to attend language courses and get to see “other cultures.” As one participant, reflected, the idea of studying abroad was a strategy to add “more knowledge
to my, I don’t know, to my life experience, so to speak. [It was] between adventure and, well, yes, maybe also getting that surplus education that sometimes we really feel we need.” Thus, education allowed women to move beyond the borders of Mexico, to increase their educational skills and, as a result, to become more employable and potentially more self-sufficient in Mexico.

While education represented the first step away from the home and toward a more independent life, employment made women feel in control of their lives because their professions gave them the kind of lifestyle and future they imagined for themselves. The women who worked prior to moving to Canada, considered themselves very independent and in control of their lives. Riaño (2015, 52) points out that “professional involvement has become a focus of personal identity for many Latin American women.” Indeed, some participants dedicated substantial parts of their narrative to detail their employment activities and their professional growth in Mexico. Ana, for example, described how she began to consolidate her career as a dentist when she opened her own practice. And Sandra referred excitedly to the various employment challenges and opportunities she had encountered while looking for work in Mexico. At the same time, the women who described their satisfaction with their professional development saw their departure from Mexico as potentially disruptive because they thought they would not be able to continue working in their area of expertise; consequently, they feared they would lose some degree of autonomy in Canada. At the same time, while education and employment represented important activities around which these women could build their autonomy and feel fulfilled, they also expressed the desire of having someone to share their achievements with. As Liliana asserted: “work might bring some satisfaction, but it’s not everything.” As we will see next, finding a romantic partner was an unexpected situation which they welcomed as a way to improve their autonomous lives.
Accounts on transnational relationships—such as research on mail-order brides—have focused on romantic encounters that occur as part of a purposeful search (Constable 2003, Johnson 2007, Schaeffer-Grabel 2014). The women in this study, however, described the first encounter with the men and women who would become their partners as “unplanned” and “unexpected.” Rather than actively seeking a partner, these women prioritized other aspects of their lives like their education, employment, family relations, the desire to become more independent, and, in some cases, the romantic relationships they already had. However, finding the “right” romantic partner was, therefore, a way to “complement” the autonomous life they were constructing. Scholars have pointed out that romantic love encompasses the idea of finding wholeness through the encounter of a compatible “other” to share a life with. Giddens (1992, 35) writes that, since the eighteenth century, romantic love has been constructed as a reparative emotion, where “the other, by being who he or she is, answers a lack which the individual does not even necessarily recognise—until the love relation is initiated.” For the women in this study, the encounter with their romantic partners constituted both a disruptive and reparative moment.

The participants described ways in which they had to re-organize their lives to accommodate a romantic partner; in other words, they had to pause or modify their routines to make space for their romantic attachments. Tania, for example, described in detail the plans she had set out for her life: completing a university degree in London, improving her French, becoming an au pair, and travelling around Europe: “I had my life planned out. ... In my mind, there was no room for a relationship and least of all for a marriage.” Despite her conviction to focus on the plans she already had, Tania decided to change them: she attempted to study in Montreal again but, being unable to do so, she remained in Mexico and visited her partner Farid regularly in Canada. Later on, when they decided to marry, Tania
also chose to drop out of school so she could join Farid in Canada as soon as possible. Other women talked about rejecting employment opportunities and, importantly, challenging their family’s expectations for the sake of their romantic relationships. For some women, the changes in their routines were the result of being in long-distance relationships, which meant they had to organize their lives around online interactions, phone conversations, long physical absences but a strong virtual presence, and occasional visits to each other’s countries.

Despite the changes they had to implement in their lives, these women saw their romantic relationships as reparative. Their choice of partner was a response to the strong desire to have an intimate partner with whom to share their lives, as well as being with a person who shared their values and supported their autonomy and life plans. As opposed to popular accounts of romantic love as something that happens at “first sight,” through an “instantaneous attraction” (Giddens 1992, 40), the participants described falling in love as a process through which they first got to know their partners, and then they chose to love them (hooks 2002). Indeed, the participants explained that they spent some time getting to know the other person more intimately and getting involved in each other’s lives before starting a romantic relationship. This process allowed women to choose an “ideal” partner who supported their autonomous lives, the desire to work and study, and their dreams of exploration, stability, and family-making. An element that stood out in the choice of partner was the possibility of forming more equal intimate relationships. Particularly, the participants referred to experiences with machismo within their families and their previous intimate relationships. These experiences had limited their sense of autonomy and power over their lives. Instead, they were open to finding more respectful, caring, and supportive partners. Machismo appeared in their lives in a variety of situations: through the family’s pressure to fulfil traditional gender roles, through romantic partners who were disrespectful and dismissive of them only for being women, and through experiences with economic,
emotional, and physical violence. Frida, for example, explained that, prior to meeting her French partner, she had a relationship with a man that had a “slightly macho” attitude; and while she felt that man had never disrespected her, she felt annoyed because he used to make comments that placed Frida in a position of inferiority: “to me they were attempts to control my life and limit me when I didn’t want to limit myself.” It should be noted that, in seeking equality, the participants were not necessarily looking for a radical reconfiguration of their gender roles. Instead, following Nehring’s theory of “negotiated familism,” these women continued to value the traditional Mexican family structure while, at the same time, they expected to have more control over their lives and more power to prioritize their individuality over the family’s expectations.

The women in heterosexual relationships with non-Mexican partners felt particularly “surprised” to meet men whose behaviors were “less macho.” While these women wondered whether the lack of machismo was connected to the culture of the partner or not, they explained one aspect they found attractive was the respect and care these men professed for them. Some scholars have discussed the search for partners across borders as a strategy for Latin American women to “escape” the machismo of the nation (Roca et al. 2012). In her study of Mexican middle-class women who seek relationships with American men through online correspondence, Schaeffer-Grabel (2004) for example found that her interviewees wanted to “defect” Mexico because they saw it as a macho nation full of “immature, restless, noncommittal, and backward men” (38), while they attempted to be closer to the US, a nation they considered to be an “utopia of capitalism, democracy, and freedom within the First World” (40). However, in my sample I found that, whether the partners were Mexican or not, the participants chose relationships where they felt there was a potential for more equality, care, love, and respect. Therefore, we can say that, in general, romantic relationships were a strategy for these Mexican women to challenge, rather than “escape,” machismo. Daniela is a
case in point: she described her Mexican partner Carlos as “the love of her life” because of the attentions and care he had shown during the initial years of their relationship. Carlos, however, became dismissive years later, when he was about to move to Canada. Yet, Daniela’s conviction to continue the relationship and join him in Canada was a way for her to confront Carlos’ machismo and demand respect and love; after all, she reflected that “this isn’t him. I want to know what happened.” The women in same-sex relationships also challenged the traditional patriarchal family structure through their romantic relationships. Sandra, for example, spoke at length about the close bond she had with her parents and sisters. Even after moving out of her parent’s home, she relied on their emotional and practical support, and tried to visit them often. Although initially she worried about her family’s opinion and moral judgement of her relationship with a woman, eventually she took the decision to continue the relationship and give new meaning to the notion of family, where she did not need to become a mother or wife, and where there was no need for a male partner. Like the other participants, Sandra and Emilia expected to be in same-sex relationships where love coexisted with a respect for their autonomy. In spite of their desire for equality, later on, some participants revealed the inequalities existing in their relationships with Mexican and non-Mexican partners (see Chapter 3). However, for now it is important to mention that the women in this study expected and hoped they could fulfil their individual life plans and, at the same time, add satisfaction to their lives by having a loving partner with whom to share their lives.

*Romantic love, distance, and Mexican women as the migrating partner*

Romantic love was central in the decision of these women to leave Mexico. While I do not intend to define romantic love or to address the ways in which the participants described this emotion, following Morrison et al.’s discussion (2012, 508), a relevant question to ask in the context of these women’s stories is: “what does love do?” In *The Cultural Politics of*
*Emotions*, Sarah Ahmed describes love—whether romantic, caring, political, or any other variation—as an emotion that “sticks” people together. Furthermore, she adds that love has a *force* or “pull” that “moves us ‘toward’ something” (2015, 124); in other words, love creates movement. In similar terms, for the women in this study, the strong romantic attachment they developed for their partners was a motivator of their transnational mobility; put differently, they considered that the love they felt for their partners *moved* them to Canada. Giddens (1992, 44) adds that romantic love is an emotion that provides people with “a long-term life trajectory, oriented to an anticipated yet malleable future.” Therefore, the transnational movement these women engaged in was a movement toward an imagined and seemingly happier future. While it is clear in their stories that romantic love and the desire for physical proximity were determining aspects of these women’s mobility, another important question to ask is: why did these Mexican women migrate, rather than their partners?

To answer this question, we must first understand that geographical distance was the factor that opened the question of migration. First of all, some women fell in love with partners living outside of Mexico. And while they talked positively about the experience of developing a long-distance relationship, they also expressed a desire to eventually be able to share more time with their partners in physical proximity. Other women had been living with their partners in Mexico for several years; however, distance became a limitation in two ways: some were in relationships with Mexican partners who started a process of migration to Canada. Others had been living in Mexico with Canadian partners who eventually had to return to Canada. In both cases, the women decided to follow the partner to Canada in order to continue the relationship. In other words, the partners took turns in being the migrating partner. Thus, Mexican women’s love migrations were sometimes preceded by their partners' migrations to Mexico. In any case, migration was a response to the existing geographic distance between these women and their partners, or the threat of being physically separated.
The women I interviewed also agreed to migrate because they considered themselves capable of coping with an international migration and adapt to a new country. As middle-class women who highly valued their education and professional aspirations, they saw migration as an opportunity to be near their partners in a place that offered the prospect of a happier and stable future; in other words, they idealized Canada as a place with the best environment for the development of both partners. The women based these idealizations on media representations of Canada as a modern and developed country, as well as on popular narratives of Canada and the United States as places of opportunity and progress. The women who had already lived with their partners in Mexico were able to assess the viability of remaining in the country; however, as one participant explained, she worried that in Mexico her partner would not be able to find stable employment. Other women whose partners had never lived in Mexico considered asking them to move to Mexico. Nevertheless, they felt that their partners would not be able to cope with the change because they did not speak Spanish, their profession would not translate into a successful career in Mexico, and the partner’s standard of living would be compromised. One participant, for example, explained that, as a plumber, her partner would not be able to find a well-paid job in Mexico. She worried that he would then lose the comforts he already had in Canada such as a car, a home, and a stable income. Instead, the participants considered that their professional skills and education would allow them to find good employment opportunities and professional growth in Canada. Hence, several women stressed the importance of concluding their university studies before moving.

Another point is the question of love migration and gender roles. In a study of Latin American women who migrated to Switzerland for male romantic partners, Riaño (2015, 51) concluded that women tend to be the migrating partner because they prioritize the men’s career over their own; in other words, Riaño found that the women in her sample continue to
follow traditional gender roles where men are the “providers” and women become the “homemakers.” However, Riaño’s analysis presents some limitations, because it focuses on heterosexual women who had already migrated to Switzerland and, in doing so, her work excludes cases of Latin American women living in their own countries with European partners. In contrast, there are three cases in my sample of women whose partners lived in Mexico first before they moved permanently to Canada. While Riaño’s work opens the question of the degree to which love migrations are enmeshed in patriarchal relations of power, in my sample I was able to discern that men are not always the migrating partners and that women migrants take into consideration more than the male partner’s ability to provide for them. This is why the participants emphasized the importance of employment and studies and, in fact, they were hopeful that they would be able to work in their professions in Canada. The voices of lesbian women are also important in this conversation because they demonstrate that the decision to prioritize one country over the other, the mobility of one partner over the other, is not necessarily connected to questions of power and gender roles, but with the hope that, by being together, they can construct a successful and happy future.
CHAPTER 3: DISPLACEMENTS

“I had to struggle and resist to emerge from that context and then from other locations with mind intact, with an open heart. I had to leave that space I called home to move beyond boundaries, yet I needed also to return there.”

—bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*

When the women in this study decided to migrate, their goal was to have a greater degree of intimacy with their partners; in other words, they expected to share a space and a life with them. However, their migrations confronted them with the reality of nation-state borders. I refer to this part of the love migration journey as “displacements” to bring attention to how moving between places that “come to be inhabited as home involve the discontinuities of personal biographies” (Ahmed 1999, 343). Indeed, the participants did not view their move to Canada as a migration per se, but as the decision to move in with their partners. Yet, the process of crossing borders confronted them with experiences that disrupted their emotions, romantic relationships, and the lives they had led so far. To show the “discontinuities” that took place, in this chapter I will focus on two specific processes: the emotions of leaving Mexico, and the bureaucracy of arriving in Canada. In the first section, I look at the conflicting emotions that the participants had to deal with as they left their homes in Mexico. These emotions show how, despite the excitement to move close to their partners, they also realized the distance they were placing with respect to the lives they had constructed so far. In the second section, I address the legal practicalities of migration to show how the emotions that motivated these women’s mobility went through a process of bureaucratization which implied proving their relationships to the Canadian Government and being subjected to immigration regulations that constrained the autonomy they had imagined themselves having in Canada. The aim of this chapter is to show how crossing borders ultimately established some constraints for the participants, and set the conditions in which they experienced their lives in Canada once they settled.
Emotional departures: Home, mobility, and conflicting feelings

Departure marked a moment of change in these women’s life stories. It constituted an emotionally-loaded moment that some interviewees found difficult to articulate. In the narration of this part of their stories, the women described vivid memories of good-byes and words exchanged before leaving. What stood out, however, were the contradictory and often conflicting feelings that accompanied these women’s departures. Migration scholars have in fact noted that “the co-existence of different, even conflicting emotional orientations [is] part and parcel of migrants' emotional experience” (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015, 76). Yet, emotions vary from journey to journey and depend on the reason for the migration and the conditions in which it occurs. Therefore, to understand the participants’ conflicting emotions, it is important to first explore the social and spatial relationships that produced these emotions (Bondi et al 2007) which, in this case, relate to the place of departure: home.

Leaving home and moving in

Discussions on migratory journeys usually consider migrations as “always and already a movement away from home” (Ahmed 1999, 339); however, scholars like Ahmed argue that, instead of thinking of “home” as a place with fixed boundaries, we should radically question the opposing concepts of “home” and “away.” For the participants, this opposition was problematic, namely because “home” was both a point of departure and a point of arrival, a place of origin and of destination (Fortier 2003, 118). So, if on the one hand home was the family, place, and community they were about to leave behind, on the other, it was also the place they saw themselves forming with their partners once in Canada. Research on mobility has emphasized that moving to and away from home is an ordinary aspect of people’s lives, (Holdwsorth 2013, Ayabek et al 2015); it is what mobility scholars call an “intimate mobility,” and refers to processes of movement “through which intimacy is formed and
dissolved” (Holdsworth 2013, 36). Two forms of intimate mobility relevant to the participants’ migratory trajectories are “leaving home” and “moving in.”

“Leaving home” represents a common and significant event in people’s lives. It marks the moment a person, usually in their youth, moves out of the parental home to become independent (38). Although culturally-specific and dependent on a person’s economic standing, it is a way for individuals to manage expectations of proximity and distance with their families (46). In Mexico, leaving home does not occur at a specific age, nor is it always economically viable or desirable. Conditions such as the decision to form a family or the location of the place of study or work can influence Mexicans’ decision to leave home. For women, leaving home is also an act of self-determination which allows them to have more independence and control over their lives. Yet, as I explained in the discussion of “negotiated familism,” for Mexican women, the trajectories away from home do not necessarily produce a significant separation from the family; rather they are a way to negotiate “not being too close, but at the same time not being too far away” (46). Among my participants, some had already left home, while others narrated expecting to do so one day. For those who had already moved, leaving home appeared as a fluid rather than a unidirectional mobility: there were cases where women who had previously moved out to live with a partner returned to live with their parents after the relationship ended; others moved out to live on their own, but decided to move back in order to be close to their parents—especially in the months preceding their departure to Canada; for some, leaving home had meant relocating to a new city, but the continuous trips between their new home and the parental home created a sense that both places were equally homey and welcoming. Leaving home, then, meant different degrees of physical separation between participants and their families. Even if they moved away, these women found ways to overcome the distance, which made them feel like they were never “too far” from home. In all, they created a dynamic concept of “home.”
Leaving home can also mean the arrival at another home. “Moving in” and “moving homes” are two types of intimate mobilities where home is the destination. The concept of “moving in” has been generally associated with couples, and it marks the moment when two people agree to share a space, thus increasing their level of intimacy. The intention of this mobility can be the formation of a family or household (67), and it can precede or result in marriage. On the other hand, scholars have linked the concept of “moving homes” to family dynamics, specifically to the decision to adjust the housing situation to the circumstances of the family (66). These two types of mobility are relevant here because they determined the participants’ migrations to Canada: the women who had never lived with their partners considered their migrations a step to “move in” and “start living” with them; while those who no longer lived with their partners, saw the migration as a relocation to a new home in Canada. Therefore, “home” became not just a dynamic space within their country but, when these women decided to migrate, the concept further expanded beyond the boundaries of Mexico. It became what Svašek & Skrbiš (2007) call a “shifting centre” with the potential of “[transforming] migrant lives into a perpetual balancing act” (373).

Even though the participants had either moved out of the parental home or expected—and desired—to do so at some point in their lives, their departures were emotional because moving to Canada felt like placing a great distance between themselves, their families, and the life they had led so far in Mexico. This sense of distance, however, was mediated more by the legal and cultural borders, than by geographical distance. After all, they understood that, this time, leaving home meant more than moving out of the parental or current residence; it meant leaving the nation and, therefore, their community and sense of belonging. Dulce, for example, expressed this sentiment as she discussed her feelings prior to leaving Mexico:

… there was that clash of cultures that made me think “well, I’ll move to Canada and what’s it going to be like to live there?” I mean, there was that question of what will happen to me here [in Canada] because, somehow, it’s not the same to say: “I’m marrying a Mexican and I will move
as far as Guadalajara,” for example. There you can still have your normal life, you can go visit your family and do things together, even if you’re in a different city.

For Dulce, moving across borders meant distance because she faced the prospect of encountering difference through a “clash of cultures” and the uncertainty of not knowing what kind of life she would have in Canada. Like Dulce, other women and their close relations experienced the feeling that moving across borders would disrupt the “normality” of their lives. Crossing borders, then, carried the implications of changing cultures, languages, membership and jurisdiction (Aybek et al 2015). While “leaving home” is not unique to migrants (Kaplan 1996, 5), nor is “moving in” or “changing residences” an event that occurs only within the boundaries of a nation, the conditions in which this mobility occurred for the participants—that is, the imminence of crossing borders—created a tension that became evident in the conflicting emotions that accompanied their departures. Below I present some of the emotions that were prominent in these moments of departure, and which appeared to coexist alongside other seemingly contradictory feelings.

“I had mixed feelings”: The emotional ambivalence of love migrants’ departures

Departures constitute a decisive moment in immigrants’ experiences: they involve leaving something behind in order to start something new elsewhere. Because something is “left” behind, the ideas of “sacrifice” and “loss” tend to be prominent in these narratives, which can give place to feelings of pain and injury. One of such emotions was pain. In her analysis of pain, Ahmed (2014) describes this emotion as an “intrusion of something other within the body that creates the desire to re-establish the border” (27). Although Ahmed bases her analysis of pain on a discussion of the body as a “border,” thinking of more physical and political boundaries, for the participants, pain was an emotion that did not call for a “re-establishment of borders,” but rather for a desire to remove them. In fact, borders were the “intruding object” that created the painful feeling. Gloria Anzaldúa (2007) conceives of borders in similar terms, when she describes the US–Mexico border as a “1,950-mile long
open wound / dividing a pueblo a culture” (24). While for Anzaldúa, borders are the gap that separates a community that should be united, for the women in this study, they represented the impossibility to be physically close to their loved ones. In both cases, however, borders appear as pain-inflicting presences.

While the idea of border-crossings and pain is very prominent in migration narratives, in my interviews, border-crossings appeared as both painful and reparative. Tania, for example, described the pain and healing of her departure as follows:

When I realized “oh, I’m leaving!” I didn’t want, to tell you the truth, I’m not going to lie: I didn’t want to come [to Canada]. I don’t know, even now it hurts to not be near my parents. I know we had to separate and everything, but even so, it’s not the same thing seeing each other once a week than not seeing each other at all and yeah, hm… it was the excitement, obviously of “oh, finally I will be with Farid and happy and everything, it’s all starting.” I thought “oh, almost there, almost there, almost there!” but I also cried. I cried a lot in the airplane for my parents, because I’m also very close to my brother. I only have one and, I don’t know, the idea of not seeing him to me was like… it hurt a lot. I don’t know, I cried a lot in the airplane.

Here, Tania talks about pain in relation to distance. Even though leaving home was something she knew “had” to happen one day, she saw her departure to Canada as the moment that created an insurmountable separation between herself and her family. Tania’s departure “opened” a wound, that means not seeing her family “at all” and, looking back, she also considered that the pain of this injury still lingers, “even now,” years after she migrated. In parallel to this narrative of pain, Tania also spoke of the opposite feeling: being “finally happy and everything.” While the distance with her family grew as she moved, she also felt the distance with her partner Farid shrink. Her movement created a bridge that “healed” and closed up a separation that had been present throughout their relationship. This is clear in the repetition of the words “almost there, almost there, almost there!” which denote her sense of urgency to be near her partner. This conflict of emotions placed Tania in an in-between state, a borderland that, as Anzaldúa explains, is “created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (25). Likewise, Tania’s story reveals how
borders feel like “unnatural” separations and, consequently, movements across borders can create the desire of wanting to move and, at the same time, wanting to stay put.

While Tania’s emotional ambivalence deals with injury and healing, for Frida, this ambivalence was linked to change and transformation. Throughout our conversation, Frida expressed several times her desire for emancipation, of wanting to leave her parent’s home because of the tension that existed with her mother. She saw herself mature enough to leave and look after herself. The timing of this separation from the parental home aligned with the decision to move in with her partner Luc, which also meant migrating to Canada. Although she had been looking forward to this departure, rather than excitement, she had a mix of emotions:

I had mixed feelings because I was really excited, I was happy that the day was coming, but at the same time, I was a bit sad for my family. I realized that it was going to be a crucial life-changing moment. I knew that I was leaving and that, when I returned home, I wouldn’t return the same person, that it wasn’t going to be the same, that it wouldn’t be my room anymore, that it wasn’t going to be –. I don’t know, it was still going to be home but it wasn’t going to be the same anymore … [At the airport] my parents cried and I did too, but not in front of them [laughs]. Eh, but I don’t know, I had this shot of energy of saying “I’m not scared, everything will be OK, I will be able to look after myself.”

Frida talks about this moment in similar terms to the departure of a hero who is about to embark in a journey of maturation. The central topic of her narrative is change and the transformation is linked to herself and to the space and the people she was about to leave. For instance, she interprets home as a space that would remain the same, but her relationship to that place would change: her room would no longer be hers, she would interact and feel different in that space, and her presence in that home would confront her with the changes she had undergone. Likewise, she described a sadness that is not hers, but that exists “for” her family, because in moving, she recognized she would alter the dynamics and balance of the family in some way. At the same time, her words express the excitement of embracing the change and proving herself or testing her autonomy. Frida’s emotions of departure show the
realization that leaving home would inflict an unknown, yet desired, change on her, but also the uncertainty of the degree to which her mobility would affect the people around her.

While Tania and Frida recounted their personal feelings of departure, other women referred to the comments and opinions of family and friends to explain their own emotions. Svašek (2010) considers that, before departing, migrants and their families have important emotional interactions as a way to “[attempt] to influence each other’s feelings” (866). In some cases, such interactions created arguments and confrontations, as well as moments of reflection and conversations which allowed participants to reassure themselves and their social circles that leaving Mexico was the right decision and, above all, that it was their decision. At the same time, the reactions of family and friends were responses to the specific circumstances that surrounded the participants’ departure; therefore, they reveal the ways in which both sides tried to make sense of a move that would bring distances, absences, and adjustments to their lives.

Daniela presented the conflicting emotions of departure from her parents’ perspective. As we saw in the previous chapter, Daniela’s move to Canada occurred in a moment of great instability in her personal life. Her parents had recently divorced, her housing situation became difficult, and her partner Carlos had abruptly left Mexico to permanently live in Canada. When Daniela discussed the moment of her departure, she recounted her parent’s emotional reactions to her decision:

My mom was a bit angry because she said “don’t you see [Carlos] doesn’t care about you? And there you go after him. I mean, at least here you have me or your sister, or you have your family, your friends. But there, you won’t have anyone. You don’t even speak English or French, so why do you go? [In Canada] I won’t be able to see what he says or does to you” … So, my mother felt stressed about that, and when I told her “I have my ticket, I’m leaving,” she was very angry. … And my father was more like “well, if this is what you want, do it. I mean, go, try and see if this is what you want. If it doesn’t work, you can always come back, we’ll be waiting for you, but at least you won’t always wonder what would’ve happened.”

Daniela’s parents responded in very different ways, almost turning her departure into a dilemma. While her mother reacted with anger and fear, her father’s response was empathic
and gentle. In a way, the reactions of Daniela’s parents show two different attitudes toward distance. On the one hand, the mother saw the departure as a significant separation with the potential of becoming isolated because “there you won’t have anyone.” Not only did the mother fear that Daniela lacked the language skills and social connections to get by, but more importantly the support and surveillance of the family. The words of Daniela’s mother also reveal a feeling of helplessness, of not being in control of the situation or able to help her daughter across borders. Moving countries, therefore, meant placing a barrier to their mother–daughter relations. On the other hand, the father was encouraging, almost echoing Daniela’s own motivation to leave. However, unlike Daniela, who mentioned that she simply wanted to go and be with her partner Carlos, her father saw the departure as a temporary one, and her decision to return as something she would decide once in Canada. Rather than seeing distance as insurmountable force, then, Daniela’s father conceived of it as something reversible that could be easily overcome. After all, he reassured her that “you can always come back” because a community would be awaiting her return. In this sense, Daniela’s father conceives of her international mobility as something fluid, which can change and have different trajectories as the situation develops. The words of Daniela’s parents show how the emotions of the people around a migrant can conflict with each other and with the migrant’s own feelings. The fact that Daniela portrays her departure through her parents’ feelings also shows how emotionally ambivalent she was about leaving.

The examples I have presented here are just a sample of the interviewees’ narratives; however, they highlight the emotionally-dynamic nature of love migration. More importantly, these emotions do not come “out of nowhere.” Instead, the point of departure, the point of arrival, and the relationship the love migrant has with these places, had important implications for their feelings, especially when the politics of borders come into play. While the emotions of the departures were connected to the conflict of leaving home, next, I will
discuss how their romantic emotions underwent a process of bureaucratization as these women attempted to make of Canada their home.

Crossing legal borders: The bureaucratization of romantic love

For the women in this study, leaving Mexico to join their romantic partners in Canada involved crossing physical and legal borders. While the first step of their migrations was to physically move to Canada, the second part of their journey involved a bureaucratic process that would allow them to remain legally in the country. Although, as I argued in the previous chapter, these women migrated motivated by their romantic emotions, upon arriving in Canada they found that being in love was not sufficient to settle in the country. Indeed, their romantic emotions underwent what I call a “process of bureaucratization” because they had to “prove” their romantic relationships to the Canadian government, or to adjust them to apply to a specific immigration program. Going through this bureaucratic process was of great importance for these women because they hoped it would allow them to continue pursuing the education and/or work activities that gave them so much satisfaction while they constructed a future with their partners. Thus, they had to plan and select the most suitable path to enter and remain in Canada (Aybek et al 2015, 9); in other words, they had to select a migration route.

Among the women I interviewed, the predominant migration route was marriage; nevertheless, marriage was not always the main or desired option. A common assumption in academic research, policy, statistics and popular culture is that women who migrate for romantic reasons are always seeking marriage or have already married (Mai & King 2009, 296). While this view prioritizes the legal aspect of their migrations and has provided important insights into women’s migratory trends, it ignores the decision-making process, emotions, and attitudes around marriage, which often conflict with the idea that marriage is the end goal of every relationship. Thus, in this section my goal is twofold: to problematize
the concept of the “marriage migrant” in order to delve deeper into the situations that ultimately led the interviewees to choose marriage as their migration route; and secondly, to understand what the process of legal migration was like for the women who ultimately entered the country as spouses. I want to argue that love migrants do not automatically follow the same migration route. Rather, they engage in a process of researching, weighing options, and choosing the path that best matches the particular conditions of their relationships. As one participant told her partner: “if we’re going to take this decision [to migrate] … we have to be sure of what will happen, of what’s possible, of all the possibilities, whatever they are.”

*Canada’s family reunification policy*

It is well-known that nation-state borders were established to police and restrict the entry of individuals to a nation (Williams 2010, 163); in fact, Wray (in Charsley 2012) writes that “all borders, including those that incorporate natural features are social constructions that reflect the interests of dominant sites of power” (41). In this context, it is important to understand how governments use borders to control who can and cannot establish a romantic relationship with the citizens and residents of its nation. As Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2014) point out, even though Western states increasingly intervene less and less in individuals’ private lives, “when the basic right to love crosses the frontier, the nation-state’s tolerance comes to an end” (176). In other words, governments control cross-border relationships in ways that they do not control relationships between their citizens (Williams 2010, 169).

In Canada, Family Reunification has been a key part of immigration policy that regulates the immigration of partners to the nation. Since the beginning of the 20th century, Canada has actively sought and encouraged immigration, mainly for economic reasons. It was after World War II that “family reunification” appeared as an option that allowed immigrant workers to bring their families with them to Canada (Thibault et al 2017, 2). From
that moment on, family reunification became, and continues to be, one of the three migration classes in Canada—together with the economic, and humanitarian classes. From the onset, the intention of this policy was to allow certain economic migrants to bring their wives and children to Canada. This option made the country attractive for potential workers and, in more practical terms, it allowed the government to counter the labor shortages that the nation faced as it continued to grow (4). Although with the years there have been several changes to the family reunification policy, its focus continues to be the reunification of immigrants with their families; in other words, at the core of this policy is the conviction that only migrants in family-like relationships can legally settle within its borders. Despite this apparent openness to the immigration of partners, Thibault et al (2017) remind us that, “[because] Canada focuses on the economic contribution of immigration, family class immigration is regularly restricted” (4).

Initially, family class focused on the immigration of the most immediate members of the nuclear family, that is, the spouse—usually a wife—and children; however, since the beginning of the new millennium, the Canadian government has expanded its definition of “spouse” to include other types of partnerships (4). Aside from marital spouses, it began to consider common-law and conjugal partners, as well as recognizing same-sex relationships within the frame of the above definitions. According to the official Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) website (2017), common-law relationships are those where two persons of the same or opposite sex have lived in a marriage-like relationship for at least twelve consecutive months prior to applying for migrant status. On the other hand, a conjugal relationship comprises a couple which has been together for at least one year, but might not have been able to cohabitate “because of reasons beyond [the couple’s] control (e.g., immigration barrier, religious reasons or sexual orientation).” Critically, it is through policies like family reunification that governments define and shape concepts like “family,” “spouse,”
and “marriage” (Demleitner 2003, 279). In fact, Williams (2010) considers that while “states can and do expand their view of what marriage is and can be, [this] expansion does not necessarily mean that categories become broader” (168). Even when the Canadian government has modified its definitions to include other kinds of partnerships, its migration system continues to favour marriage and marriage-like relationships.

Restrictions to spousal migrants and the impacts on women

According to a recent report on spousal and partner migration to Canada (Thibault et al 2017, 25), from the 79,684 immigrants who applied for permanent residency under the family class category in 2013, 55.1% were spouses or partners. Not only does this represent a significant number of applicants, but scholars have found that in Canada as well as internationally, the majority of people who migrate through the marriage route are women (Constable 2005, 4), making them especially vulnerable to any amendments in family-related immigration policy (Gabriel 2017, 181). And increasingly, changes to this policy have become stricter and more excluding. Canada provides a great example of these changes. After 2006, the Conservative government issued a campaign against “convenience marriages” which were “abusing” the system (Thibault 2017, 21). The government’s official position was that “marriage fraud is a genuine and major threat to the security of Canadians and the integrity of the immigration system” (31). As a result, the government tightened its laws to “protect” against fraudulent relationships (Beck-Gernsheim 2011, 30). This fear ultimately shaped the conditions and restrictions on spousal migrants.

Two regulations that have impacted spousal migrants are the requirement of sponsorship and the so-called Conditional Permanent Residence (CPR). The concept of “dependent” appeared in Canadian immigration policy in the 1960s, when the “sponsored class”—a predecessor of the family class—was created. The idea behind this concept was
that a migrant could make an immigration application on behalf of a family member, with the commitment of taking full financial responsibility for that person (13). However, Delmeitner (2003) argues that countries like Canada have used this concept to “limit immigration only to close relatives who are financially dependent on the sponsor” (292). From the moment of its creation, the “sponsorship” aspect of family reunification has assumed and continues to generate relationships of dependency between the sponsoring person and the family members the sponsor “brings” to Canada (Gabriel 2017, 182). A second regulation related to dependency is the conditional permanent residence (CPR) that the conservative government implemented in the 2000s. The CPR stipulates that a sponsored partner must live with her sponsor for a minimum period of two years before obtaining full permanent residence (Thibault 2017, 27). In other words, a partner’s legal status is dependent on having a harmonious relationship with the sponsor. While this measure was put in place as a way to verify that the relationship is “legitimate,” scholars, activists and migrants have criticized this measure because it puts women at risk of violence and isolation (Gabriel 2017). Indeed, CPR is a regulation that assumes that all romantic relationships and marriages are between equal partners. Another aspect of the CPR and sponsorship regulations that the conservative government established is that spousal applicants were not allowed to work or study during the initial 10 months of their applications. At the end of this period, they received an open work permit that was valid until the government reached a final decision on their applications (35). Nevertheless, as we will see in the next chapter, those initial months were critical for women to form a sense of belonging to Canada.

The above regulations are problematic because they privilege a heteronormative conformation of family and couple relationships. They were established under the guise that romantic relationships always include a “sponsor” and a “dependant” or, put differently, a provider and a home-maker. Moreover, in an attempt to create policies that can “defend” the
nation against the “threat” of fraudulent marriages, regulations like CPR establish a couple
dynamic where, for more than half a year, one partner must wait and “depend” on her spouse
to become a legal resident. As a result, the women are placed in an unequal position within
their relationships, or any existing inequalities become aggravated. Later on, I will discuss in
greater detail the implications of family reunification for spouses, but first I want to focus on
the experiences of those participants whose cases did not fit neatly in the Canadian
government’s limited definition of “partner.” In looking at these stories, it is important to
clarify that because the interviewees migrated in different years (between 1988 and 2016)
their migration processes vary, with some general similarities. My goal is not to provide a
blueprint of love migration to Canada, but to highlight the experience of love migrants’ in
facing bureaucratic migration processes (Constable 2003,187) and, above all, to stress the
diversity of ways in which love migrants attempted to migrate to Canada.

**Considering all the possibilities: alternative migration routes**

Because moving to Canada was a way for the women in this study to move in or continue
living with their partners, each couple envisioned the development of their relationships
differently: for some, the decision to migrate followed the acceptance of a marriage proposal,
others moved expecting to marry their partners soon after migrating, and some more had no
plans to marry immediately or at all, but they were interested in cohabitating with their
partners. Although my sample showcases only a few examples of relationship types, it
importantly highlights the diversity of ways in which people construct their romantic
relationships or, as Morrison et al (2012) put it, the “different ways of ‘doing’ love” (508).
Despite this diversity, it became evident in my participants’ experiences that migratory
systems do not always recognize and sometimes even act openly against this diversity. The
fact that family reunification is the only option for cross-border relationships evidences the
problem.
Some participants, particularly women whose relationships were long-distance or those who had been in a relationship for a period shorter than the twelve months that the Canadian government required could not immediately consider family reunification as an option for their migrations. An initial issue was the difficulty of proving the emotional tie, especially if they had never cohabited or lived in close proximity to their partners. Applying as conjugal or common-law partners was, then, not a possibility as they could not meet the requirement of continuous cohabitation or prove that an “immigration barrier” had prevented them from living together. A second issue was lacking the intention of forming a family with their partners, at least at that point in their relationship, because the participants did not feel immediately inclined to marry. These two aspects already excluded them from applying through the family class, unless they married. They also expressed an initial concern with being branded “fraud marriage migrants” that were marrying “just” for the papers. But, more importantly, they felt that marriage was a premature decision that did not match their life plans. While their relationships did not meet the criteria for a family class migration, they soon found they had few other options.

The process of finding alternative migration routes was complex and required weighing the available options against the life these women had projected for their future. As a first point of entry, some women arrived in Canada through the tourist route. As tourists, they had the possibility of staying with their partners for several months while they continued searching for alternatives and “testing out” their relationships. Furthermore, they could apply to extend their visas, which some of them did; however, extending a tourist stay entailed an application process, paying fees, and the uncertainty of the government’s decision. Other aspects of their research process involved doing online searches in Canada’s immigration website, consulting online forums, and hiring immigration lawyers, all of which required a significant investment of time and money. The main options they considered for their
migrations were: applying for a work permit through an employment program—as skilled workers or investors—or becoming students in the hopes that they could remain in the country once the course was over. The participants’ main concern was finding an option that would allow them to continue living an independent life while at the same time being close to their partners. Ana emphasized this point during our interview:

I started searching to see if I could apply for a residence through the skilled worker program, because otherwise how can you stay here [in Canada]? You can’t work, you can’t do anything if you don’t have [immigration] papers. So I didn’t, well, I didn’t feel comfortable being here without working.

Ana and other women’s discomfort with “being here without working” shows how important it was for them to continue to be active decision-makers in their lives, and the anxiety they felt with the idea of losing such independence in the process of migrating. Their searches demonstrate how concerned these women were with balancing their independence and individual plans with the desire of sharing their lives with their romantic partners.

Participants narrated the search process as a daunting and frustrating task, because they often received contradictory and discouraging information: from the prospect of excessive waiting periods when applying for a work permit to promising options that seemed simple but which turned out to be lengthier and more complicated than expected. Ana’s story is an interesting example. Having just started her own practice as a dentist, she decided to apply as a “skilled worker,” a program which selects applicants “based on their ability to settle in Canada and take part in our economy” (CIC 2017). During a trip to Canada, a migration agent informed her that dentistry was an eligible occupation under the skilled worker program and, further, that she would only need to take one test to validate her credentials in the country. Over the next year, Ana prepared her documents and finally flew to Canada and entered as a tourist in order to apply to the skilled worker program from within

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2 At the time of Ana’s immigration, a list of eligible occupations still existed under the skilled worker program. Recently, the liberal government removed this requirement.
the country. Four months later, however, she received a phone call from immigration services
telling her that dentistry was no longer on the list of eligible occupations:

You can imagine: my entire process was ready, and I didn’t know that each year they make a
new list. This is why I’d thought “oh, OK, it’s one list and that’s it.” But every year they make a
new list of professions and they told me that [dentistry] was no longer in it, and yeah, that I
needed to look for another option. So, I was—, we were both, my boyfriend at that time and I
were super sad because I said “well, I mean, it’s not possible. How else can I stay?” so I tried
different ways: there was [a visa] for investors, one for students, one to work and study, it was a
whole mess! So, I got very demotivated and said “You know what? There isn’t, I mean, there is
not—, there is no other way. Either you go to Mexico or that’s it!”

At this point, Ana’s partner suggested another option: marriage. While Ana was fortunate that
her profession—at least initially—allowed her to apply as a skilled worker, other women did
not have the same luck. Instead, they found that this and other migration routes were either
impossible to take, or they required an investment of time and money that they could not
make. Ollinca, for example, found the skilled worker program was excessively lengthy and
uncertain:

You have to prove your level of English, your level of French, your level of studies and translate
this and translate that and get other documents. So, with all of that plus having to notarize every
document, it was too much money and time wasted. I told [my partner] again that, I mean, we
were going to have to wait for five years and that was if they even approved [the application].

Another option that some of women resorted to was applying to a university to be with their
partners while at the same time improving their professional skills; however, they could not
find sufficient resources to fund their studies, and they were not able to afford paying for
their course and living expenses on their own. In the end, all of the available options became
unviable because they placed these women and their relationships in unstable situations that
depended on a bureaucratic process that was very detached from these women’s actual
motivations. Thus, if initially physical distance had been the main barrier to being with their
partners, once in Canada, they found these barriers transformed into legal requirements,
paperwork, financial efforts and, more importantly, the uncertainty of waiting. It was at this
point that marriage became a serious consideration. In the words of one participant: “after
being [in a long-distance relationship] for so long, it was going to be impossible or very difficult for us to be apart again.”

Unlike the contemporary Western idea that marriages are preceded by a “romantic” and “spontaneous” proposal, for these participants, it presented itself as a pragmatic decision, often resulting from a conversation between the partners or as a suggestion from an immigration lawyer who advised that this would be the “fastest” and “most viable” route for their cases. Some factors that ultimately led the participants to agree to marry were the fear of being separated again from their partners for several years and the frustration of not finding other migration routes. Before agreeing to marry, the women narrated having moments of introspection where they weighed the implications of marriage. Ana, for example, explained:

When I had the idea of applying as a skilled worker I kind of said to myself “if it doesn’t work, I’ll come back to Mexico, right? I mean, there’s no problem, let’s see what happens.” But when someone says “marry me” it’s like, aside from being in love and everything, on the other hand you see yourself leaving family, friends, your profession, I mean everything you had, behind ... [After the marriage] I remember that I was happy but also super sad. I mean, it was like saying “OK, now there’s really no turning back.”

Coming from Mexico, a culture heavily influenced by Catholicism, for women like Ana, getting married meant a once-in-a-lifetime decision that, once taken, “there’s really no turning back.” This precisely aligns with the government’s view that marriages are the most “legitimate” kind of partnership, because they have a legally-binding aspect that creates an “everlasting” bond between two people. Yet, while some women got married to stay married, others viewed marriage as an agreement they could break if the relationship did not work. Ollinca made this clear to her partner before agreeing to marry:

I said to him: “OK, let’s do it, but keep in mind that if it doesn’t work, there’s another option which is divorce ... I mean, for me is not about doing everything for a marriage. If you’re not happy, if I’m not happy, what are we doing here? I don’t want you to do that, that in your mind you think that since you’re married, you’re screwed and you should do everything you can to keep us together, because otherwise people will start talking or I don’t know what” ... So, I told him “are you sure and can we agree that if it doesn’t work, it’s over?” He said “yes,” so I returned [to Canada] and we decided to marry.
Here, Ollinca shows how she challenged the heteronormative view of marriage. Although it is impossible to tell if dissolving her marriage would be as straightforward as she pictures it here, what her attitude toward marriage, and the experiences of other women in a similar situation, demonstrate is a shift in the meaning and value of marriage, as well as in the processes that precede the decision to marry. Indeed, their attitudes toward marriage even contradict the nation-state’s view that marital agreements constitute the most “authentic” proof of an emotional bond with a partner (Alexandrova 2007, 144). For these women, marriage was a strategy to remove the legal and physical borders separating them from their partners. Yet, we also need to recognize that underlying these issues, there was an emotional “pull” that influenced love migrants’ decisions.

While the decision of these love migrants to marry became strategic, I also want to emphasize that the Canadian migration system created the conditions for these marriage decisions. Not only were the definitions of “partner” within the family reunification policy quite restrictive and limited, but taking other migration routes proved to be a complex process. These situations forced love migrants and their partners to “legitimize” their relationships. Paradoxically, even though Canada has made substantial changes to its policy to guard itself against “fraud marriages” that “abuse” the system (Thibault 2017, 21), its own rules have created the conditions for premature and/or unwanted marriages that might not last. Furthermore, entering a marriage in order to fulfill a bureaucratic requirement—especially when it has to do with immigration—can place women in oppressive and vulnerable positions; and, in cases where there is a strong sociocultural meaning attached to marriage, these relationships can potentially be difficult to dissolve, even when one or both partners feels that the marriage is no longer working.

So far, we have seen cases where marriage eventually became a viable migration route; however, for some women this was not the case. In my sample, two factors stood out
as barriers for marriage. One such barrier was the marital history of a partner. For the marriage option to be a viable migration route both partners must be single or, if they were once married, they must be legally divorced. If this is not the case, marriage is not possible. Canada has also established some rules regarding its residents and their ability to sponsor a partner. Accordingly, permanent residents who were previously sponsored as spouses, and those who had previously sponsored a partner, are subject to a wait of at least three years in order to sponsor their current partners (CIC 2017). While these rules have, again, been put in place as a result of the growing anxiety over “convenience marriages” and the abuse to family reunification system, the reality is that they can also slow down and fully impede the mobility of migrating partners. On the other hand, another potential barrier to marriage has to do with the visibility that this route gives to same-sex relationships. Since 2002, Canada recognizes same-sex marriage and partnerships in the same terms as heterosexual ones (Thibault et al 2017, 4). Consequently, family reunification has become an option for same-sex couples. Yet, for lesbian women, migrating as a spouse does not just involve the social expectation that the couple will remain together but, it also means making their sexual orientation public. Sandra, for example, avoided the spousal route because she had not yet come out to her family when she decided to migrate. However, she was able to successfully apply to the skilled worker program, which allowed her to settle in Canada while keeping her relationship secret from her family. Although this second barrier relates more to personal reasons than policy, as we can see, marriage and civil union are not always an immediate option. Further, while Sandra was one of the few participants who settled in Canada using an alternative route to marriage/civil union, her case shows the added difficulty to migrate when being in a same-sex relationship.

So far, I have shown that marriage is not a central consideration for all love migrants, but it becomes so when they face the bureaucratic process of migration. Despite the fact that
Western nations police their citizens’ intimate relationships less and less, they have become stricter with relationships that cross their borders, often demanding that these relationships adjust to a heteronormative family structure. Indeed, through their regulations, governments like Canada’s have taken a homogenizing stance that expects every migrating partner to be a wife who migrates in order to tend for her husband. While this view excludes the great variety of romantic relationships, and disregards the importance of women’s autonomy, this stance has to do partly with governments’ lack of understanding of the current and changing trends in the formation of intimate relationships. At the same time, we must recognize that policies like family reunification are “formed in response to legitimate state discourses of who belongs within a given state” (Williams 2010, 171). Thus, we can say that nation-states use immigration policies to control who can and cannot be in a romantic relationship with a Canadian citizen or resident as well as the conditions and timing of these relationships. It is, therefore, important to question the role of marriage in women’s migration experiences, as well as the immigration policies around spousal migration. Next, I will have a closer look at the implications of family reunification for the women in this study who migrated as spouses and common-law partners.

**Migrating as “official” partners**

Initially, the women who migrated as “official” partners—that is, who were engaged or married when they crossed the border—thought that they would obtain a permanent residence with relative ease; however, they soon found that the process of approval took several years and that the regulations for spousal migrants were quite restrictive. For the women who intended to migrate as spouses, an important part of this process was the marriage itself, an event often subject to the ceremonies, rituals, and traditions specific to the participant or her partner’s culture. Depending on the agreement with their partners, marriage/civil union ceremonies occurred in either Mexico or the partner’s homeland—
which, in this study, could be Canada, Morocco, or France. For the women who married in Canada, the preparations were short and the marriage or civil union happened soon after arrival. In general, marriage in Canada proved to be a more immediate way to start the application process for the participants’ permanent residency. In contrast, marriages in Mexico and other countries were subjected to the specific culture and bureaucratic time frames of the nation, as well as to the traditions that the participant or the partner’s family expected. An interesting example in this respect is Tania’s experience with marriage in Mexico and Morocco—the homeland of her partner Farid. While they had initially intended to celebrate their civil marriage in Mexico, their plans were frustrated because an official holiday coincided with Farid’s short trip to the country. As a compromise, they decided to take advantage of a trip they had planned to Morocco to marry in that country. Yet, Tania narrated with frustration the lengthy bureaucratic process that they had to go through:

For a Moroccan to marry a foreigner, they ask for a huge number of documents … they even asked me to get cleared by the Interpol. Yeah, I mean, it was intense. And there were so many documents, they even had to photograph my passport. I went to the Mexican embassy so many times that I got to meet the Consul and deal a lot with her because [the Moroccan government] kept sending back my documents. I was [in Morocco] for three weeks and, I mean, we were supposed to travel, to see Morocco, but I spent the whole time going to court houses and coming back and going to court houses again. It was a tiring trip because we were missing so many documents [laughs]. And, well, in the end, on the last day … on a Friday, we got the permit, and that Friday we got married.

Together with the civil marriage, Farid’s family organized a traditional Moroccan celebration which involved a series of rituals and traditions that were new to Tania. Although they were able to eventually get the official document proving their marriage, Tania explained she could not move to Canada immediately because she had been denied a tourist visa. Therefore, she had to send the marriage certificate and wait some more months before she could actually move to Canada. Tania’s story reflects the ways in which, not only the receiving countries, but also the home countries and the country of their partners are involved in love migrants’ immigration processes, and they can influence the success or failure of their applications.
Once the relationship became “official” through a bureaucratic process, the next step was to apply formally for family reunification. Some women explained that they had the option to do the application from within or outside of Canada; however, few knew this choice existed and subsequently thought the only way was to start their applications once in Canada. The women who applied from within Canada entered the country as tourists, which gave them six months to compile the necessary documents before applying. I will not detail the specific documents they were asked to submit because these requirements change from year to year, and the participants themselves could not remember or chose not to discuss them. Yet, I want to emphasize that the women who took the marriage route waited between 1.5 and 2 years to get a response from the Canadian government. It is also noteworthy that they were not allowed to leave or enter Canada while they waited for a resolution. Therefore, in the eyes of the Canadian government these months of waiting were exactly that, a period in which, rather than working, studying, or engaging in other meaningful activities, these women were to wait for a response. In the following chapter I will explore how this and other conditions I detail below affected the participants’ experiences of settlement in Canada. For the time being it suffices to say that, as applicants, these women were not permitted to cross the Canadian border, and were simultaneously treated as neither citizens nor residents, but they were caught in an in-between status of “no status.”

Despite the restrictive conditions set out by the Canadian government, some women’s migration trajectories allowed them to challenge these regulations to some extent. Dulce and Lety had a strategy to deal with the bureaucracy of migration. For instance, Dulce felt very attached to her life in Mexico. She explained she had her family, friends and good employment in Mexico and “that’s why I didn’t imagine myself migrating here. What kind of job would I have? … But at the same time, I said: ‘well, [my partner] is doing everything he needs to do, I’m happy with him. Well, if I have to go, I’ll come and go.” Thus, for five years
she lived in Canada intermittently, entering the country with a tourist visa, staying for periods of six months, and returning to Mexico for two or three months. According to Dulce, this allowed her to enjoy her relationship without feeling constrained by a lengthy application process. On the other hand, Lety was a special case among the women in this study because her story of love migration started with her Canadian husband’s immigration to Mexico. She explained that she chose to first live in Mexico because she knew that she would face difficulty validating her credentials as a medical practitioner in Canada; additionally, she preferred to remain close to her family in Mexico after marrying her partner. Over a period of eleven years, she lived primarily in Mexico with her husband and children, and attempted three times to settle in Canada. Twice, Lety returned to Mexico with her husband and children before submitting the application for Canadian permanent residency because she found the process overwhelming and discouraging, as well as unnecessarily expensive. Nevertheless, in Mexico her husband was the one who had to undergo the migration process periodically, which led her to comment humorously: “ever since we’ve been together, we’ve had to pay either to the Mexican government or to the Canadian one for every single thing we do. We’ve spent 13 years making tax payments to get married, to leave, to come back, to leave again.” Despite the financial inconvenience, moving between countries gave Dulce and Lety the flexibility and freedom to avoid the constraints of the spousal migration regulations that other women faced. While this was a suitable arrangement for a number of years, at the time of our interview, both women had already sent their applications to the Canadian government and were expecting a response soon. Thus, they challenged the restrictiveness of the family reunification policy by avoiding the bureaucratic process, but eventually they had to undergo the same migration process as the other women in this study.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have analyzed how love migrants experienced displacement not only through the conflicting emotions of their departures, but through the bureaucratic formalities of their immigrations. While the participants had planned their migrations as a way to find a fulfilling future with their partners, these processes demonstrate how the crossing of borders posed some constraints these women had not expected. In other words, it “discontinued” their lives as they had lived them so far. For instance, they realized that in creating physical closeness with their partners, they placed physical distance with their families and the lives they had constructed so far. And while some of them had wanted to become more liberated from their families, they also started to realize the implications of living their main community behind. On the other hand, in attempting to make of Canada their new home, they encountered an intolerant immigration system which not only involved a complex immigration process, but also imposed restrictions to their autonomy, and created difficult conditions for their settlement in Canada. In spite of their life plans and the expectations these love migrants had for their romantic relationships, leaving Mexico and moving to Canada removed some of the control they felt they had over their lives. At the same time, they accepted this immigration process in the hopes that, once settled, they would improve their lives as they had imagined.
CHAPTER 4: EMPLACEMENTS

“For this Chicana, la guerra de independencia [the struggle for independence] is a constant.”

—Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera

The women in this study moved to Canada with the purpose of constructing a future together with their partners. However, upon moving they found that living in Canada not only represented a new stage in their romantic relationships, but it was also the start of a relationship with the new country. Unlike a temporary visit, the decision to live in a different country means more than encountering a new culture, language, and geographic location; it requires engaging with the new surroundings and creating emotional attachments. Scholars like Lems (2014, 317) have in fact pointed to the relevance that place has for the experiences of people moving across borders; indeed, she asks that we do not “overlook the placement in displacement” (333). Accordingly, I refer to this part of the love migration journey as “emplacements” because the term highlights the importance that place had for love migrants’ lived experiences. Emplacement refers to the ways in which our actions and encounters contribute to the construction of place and how, in turn, these help to build a “sense of lived involvement and identification with that place” (Seamon 2014, 41). As I will show here, Canada—the place of settlement—influenced the development of love migrants’ romantic relationship as much as the conditions of their love migrations and romantic relationships influenced their attachment to Canada.

In this chapter, I address the two processes that love migrants underwent as they settled in Canada. First, relocating to a culturally and geographically different setting posed significant challenges for these women’s romantic relationships. In fact, the participants had to re-negotiate the conditions and dynamics of these relationships. In some cases, re-negotiation involved conflicts and moments of tension, making compromises, becoming closer or more distant, making a family, or dissolving the emotional bond altogether. As
Holdsworth (2013, 35) notes, “mobility and intimacy are interdependent, as a change in one nearly always involves a change in the other.” A second process was negotiating a relationship with the new country. The conditions of these women’s migrations, as well as the places they interacted with—their homes, neighborhoods, places of everyday routine— Influenced their sense of belonging to Canada. I have divided this chapter into two sections, each dealing with one of these processes. My aim is to show that love migration is about romantic relationships and relationships to place.

**Love across borders: re-negotiating relationships with partners**

At the beginning of this thesis, I pointed out that mobility was essential for the women in this study to maintain their romantic relationships. Yet, moving to Canada also produced emotions and changes that affected their relationships. After all, settling in Canada meant coping with a new cultural environment while also dealing with the practicalities and restrictions of their immigration processes. In the midst of these changes the participants had to adjust to living with their partners—in some cases, for the first time—and make decisions about the future of their relationships. As Holdsworth (2013, 35) points out, mobility can help build connections and relationships; “however, the opposite causality between mobility and relationships also holds: mobility can drive people apart and can be a causal factor in relationship breakdown.” In this section, I will explore the ways in which love migrants’ romantic relationships evolved as they settled in Canada.

**Living arrangements: making themselves at home**

After arrival, the participants’ most important place of interaction became the home. The conditions of their living arrangements, therefore, mediated their initial impressions about life in Canada. Here, I understand living arrangements as the apartments and houses these women moved into in the months following their arrivals, as well as the people they
shared these places with, and the feelings that these places produced in them. Some women arrived at the homes of their partners; therefore, they had to spend some time making space for their objects, their routines, and for themselves. This task was easier or more difficult, depending on the partner’s willingness to make space for these women. While Daniela had “loved” Canada during her first trip, when she moved into her partner Carlos’ apartment, she had the opposite reaction:

I really didn’t like the way [Carlos] lived… He worked, but undeclared, he lived in a 1 ½ which is basically a tiny room, he had just the basics, well, you know, it was the room of a man, and I arrived to that. I really didn’t like it, but I just accepted it.

Daniela’s arrival to “the room of a man” shows how the apartment she moved into was not welcoming and it did not feel hers: she did not have sufficient space to feel comfortable and at ease to express herself. The people the participants shared their living arrangements with also affected how comfortable their new homes felt. While generally participants expected to share a place only with their partners, in some cases they actually arrived to live with the family-in-law or, otherwise, they shared the couple’s home with a family member. Sharing the living arrangements with the family-in-law meant that participants had to adjust to the habits, rules and dynamic of the family. They had to navigate the home space carefully to avoid creating conflicts and arguments that would, by extension, affect the relationship with their partners. Participants also found themselves sharing accommodation with roommates or with their own family. Sandra, for example, did not move in with her partner immediately because, as I mentioned before, she had not come out to her family when she migrated. After arrival, she moved in with her sister who was still living in Montreal at that time. While Sandra did not have to negotiate the space of home with her partner yet, she felt she lost some independence when she moved in with her sister:

[In Mexico] I owned a car, I had a good job, I had good benefits, … but I left those comforts in order to move here to become, if you want, a nuisance to my sister, because that’s the word. I had a room in my sister’s place because I wasn’t a complete nuisance, but it was difficult to take the decision to come here and leave everything for love.
Sandra’s narration describes how she felt her personal space shrank when she moved into her sister’s home and this, in turn, made her feel out of place and uncomfortable. Instead, she longed for the home and things that made her feel autonomous and fulfilled. Participants’ living arrangements ultimately produced feelings of being “at home” or, otherwise, of being “out of place.”

Life as a couple: adapting to difference, changing sameness

Sharing a space with a partner means more than emotional and physical proximity. It requires recognizing and understanding the other person’s habits and integrating them into the everydayness of life together. When couples move in together, they inevitably go through a period of transition, becoming aware of differences that can be as subtle as the way a person places objects around the home, or as challenging as different daily routines. However, for the women I interviewed, this expected period of transition acquired a different level of significance for several reasons: first, the experience of being in a different sociocultural context exacerbated some of the conflicts and tensions that arose in the process of cohabitating and/or getting to know the other person. Second, having recently arrived in Canada, the partners became these women’s main social connection; in other words, they became dependent on their partners for practical and emotional support.

For the women in relationships with non-Mexican partners, one of the main challenges of living together was dealing with cultural differences. Although, initially, cultural differences had been part of the attraction of being with these “foreign” men and women, these differences became points of conflict when they started to share a space and life together. In her work on intercultural couples, Bystydzienki (2011, 3) asserts that “what constitutes a ‘different’ culture from one’s own may not be easy to define or recognize. Although it often appears that a group of people has a clear idea of who or what belongs and
does not belong, on closer examination the dividing line is fluid.” My intention is not to define “culture” and “cultural difference” here, as these are two very broad topics that are beyond the scope of this thesis. The women I interviewed, however, considered that some of the differences they encountered in the interactions with their partners were cultural. In other words, they created their own understandings of their Mexican culture and the culture of their non-Mexican partners. Ana, for example, explained that living with a Canadian partner has been

…between easy and complicated. I mean, easy because we get along really well because, thank God, that which brought us together continues to unite us. But it’s been difficult because, as I told you, you get to know little things that you don’t like about the other person and you used to see everything in a positive light, until you reach a point in the relationship in which you start to see the negatives, and on top of that you see it and think “no way! And this will be forever? I mean, until death does us part. My god!” [laughs]. … And our cultures as well. There are times when [my husband] blames my culture, you understand? [He says] “it’s because you’re from Mexico!” or, I don’t know, I tell him “it’s because you’re from [Canada].”

While Ana understands that the tensions in her relationship are part of the process of getting to know a person in the intimacy of home and the routine of the everyday, her case also shows how cultural difference became significant whenever there was a conflict or a disagreement with her partner. In other words, they blamed cultural differences whenever they found disagreeable personal behaviors. Indeed, participants and their partners used culture to explain situations and attitudes that seemed odd or unfamiliar. It also allowed them to “other” their partner in relation to their cultural identity as Mexicans and, as a consequence, to their understanding of their Mexican culture.

Frida shared an interesting experience that exemplifies the way in which she has been constructing her Mexicanness based on differences in time management. While for Luc, her partner of French nationality, it was important to be on time when meeting with friends, Frida found it acceptable to arrive a few minutes after the agreed time. These differences became a point of conflict, which Frida considered were related to culture:
I never used to hurry up. I used to think “they can wait ten minutes, it’s going to be OK” and [Luc] is super strict about taking my time [to get ready]. Whenever we go out, I don’t know, to a dinner or something. I dress up and spend tons of hours getting ready, and if I don’t know what to wear I think “oh, it’s OK” and I try everything on, and he’s very strict. Something that really makes him angry is to be late … so I realized it’s true, we have that cultural difference. I mean, this is when you realize that the things that for you were normal, in another world, in other cultures, they are not normal.

Frida’s narrative highlights two important aspects about cultural identity and living with difference: first, Frida considered that her attitude towards time was relative to her being Mexican, and that Luc’s time management was directly related to his Frenchness. Thus, Frida based her construction of “otherness” on the perceived cultural differences between French and Mexican cultures. It is important to clarify that Frida and Luc’s experiences are by no means representative of the cultures they come from. Yet, in order to make sense of each other’s behaviours, she looked at culture as the element that created the tension. This example shows that, in the process of living with non-Mexican partners, the women in this study found themselves negotiating their sense of self and cultural identity. Frida recalled that the tension resulting from the differences in time management led to “small arguments” which made her realize that “[Luc and I] don’t have the same way of thinking, so we have to talk to try to reach an agreement.” The second aspect that this example addresses is precisely the question of how the interviewees and their partners dealt with these differences. Like other participants, Frida found that living with a non-Mexican required negotiating what she perceived to be cultural differences in order to resolve the tensions. Therefore, she and Luc agreed to become more tolerant of each other’s behaviors or, as Frida put it, they decided to “make compromises.” To Frida, making compromises has meant making a conscious effort to accept Luc’s behaviors and expectations, while being willing to modify her own, so long as Luc also does the same. Therefore, Frida explained that they both have since become more flexible in their time management to avoid conflict. This strategy has been a way for them to accommodate difference at home.
Although Frida and Luc managed to re-negotiate their relationship in a way that made them both feel at ease, other participants found the differences were overwhelming and difficult to navigate. After moving in with her husband, Ana felt alienated from him. Moving to Canada had also triggered symptoms of depression and, as a result, she started to distance herself emotionally from her husband. When it became evident that the situation did not improve between them, her husband suggested counselling to work through their differences and conflicts with the help of a professional. Ana agreed and they found ways to understand behaviours that, in their view, grew out of cultural differences. Language and communication also affected some of the interviewees’ relationships. Ollinca, for example, explained that the main difference between her relationship with her Canadian partner Fred and her previous Mexican partners was language:

I feel it’s a bit more complicated because, it’s that: two people who come from different families, different countries, that grew up in totally different conditions is like, ugh … things flow and it’s OK because the relationship is good, but sometimes it’s a bit difficult and tiring because you have to explain jokes or explain a phrase or explain why you do things this way and not the other. Because, as I told you, if it’s already difficult to have a relationship in your own language, now imagine when it is in a different language … Sometimes we’re arguing and at the end we realize that he was talking about dogs and I was talking about cats, because there’s that, right? The language … So, in the end it turns out that we were fighting about totally different things. And, oh, it’s a bit tiring but it’s OK, I mean, you have to be very patient.

Ollinca explains very well the various layers of cultural difference that come into play when living with a non-Mexican partner. As she found, linguistic differences cause misunderstandings when the partners are not fluent in one another’s first language. Therefore, the compromise she has made is to be patient as she gains more confidence in her spoken English. While Ollinca has been living close to three years with Fred, other women who were in longer relationships with non-Mexican husbands explained their strategies to make space for their language at home. Specifically, they spoke about how they now use Spanish to express their emotions and feelings more precisely, especially in moments where emotions are heightened. One participant said that, while the language at home is English, “if I’m angry, I talk to my partner in Spanish, and I don’t care if he doesn’t understand.”
him: the problem is his, not mine.” Interviewees, then, responded to linguistic barriers by making their partners do their share of work in learning and attempting to understand Spanish.

The women in relationships with Mexican partners had the advantage of sharing a space with a person with the same culture and language; however, living with sameness in a new sociocultural context posed some challenges of its own. Daniela’s case exemplifies this situation very well. Daniela followed her Mexican partner Carlos to Canada, hoping that their relationship would improve; once she arrived in Canada, however, he continued to behave in the same dismissive manner. For several weeks, Daniela felt rejected by her partner. As she became more and more aware that Carlos had no intention to change, Daniela threatened to leave him: “I told him everything I had never had the courage to tell him. And that’s when our situation changed. … So, we started to be more like, to communicate more. Much more. And I started to feel like I was part of, part of the relationship.” In Daniela’s case, a new cultural context enabled her to address the reasons that for years had produced tension in her relationship. She considered that her migration has allowed her to see things differently:

I am very happy that I now see things differently. I’m sure that, if I had stayed in Mexico, even though I used to be the kind of woman who would say “oh no, you won’t disrespect me, and you won’t do stupid things when you’re with me” I feel that you still have like a higher tolerance to machismo [in Mexico] than you do [in Canada]. Here you realize that it’s not normal, that there are many things that are not normal.

It is important to note here that the fact that Daniela encountered less machismo in Canada does not mean that it does not exist here or that all Mexican men are macho. Her experience demonstrates how Mexican women found the strength to challenge intolerable behaviours that they used to accept while living in Mexico. Daniela also explained that seeing the concerted efforts in Montreal to deal with cases of domestic violence, as well as the availability of support services for women has given her the confidence to stand up against macho behaviours in general. The re-negotiation that took place in the process of moving in
with Mexican and non-Mexican partners was an important step which eventually determined how the relationships progressed. As we will see next, for some women, this involved the decision to have children.

_Raising a family_

The cultural and emotional effects of migration and the immigration process affected the interviewees’ decisions of how to raise a family in Canada. The experience of pregnancy, including unplanned pregnancy, was, for many, one of the most difficult and intense moments in Canada. Some of the interviewees became pregnant while they were still temporary visitors. As I discussed in the previous chapter, holding a tourist visa was a temporary solution for some women while they searched for a suitable migration route. Yet, as tourists, they had no access to the health system in any of the provinces in Canada so, in order to access medical care, these women were required to pay for their expenses or be privately insured. In addition, being far from their families and support networks exacerbated their vulnerability. Metzi, for example, became pregnant when she was searching for options to remain in Canada and she was also “testing” her relationship with her Mexican partner, Jorge. In her case, the marriage route was not possible because Jorge had not filed for divorce with his previous partner. Metzi felt excited at the possibility of forming a family with Jorge, but confused because she knew that not having a residence permit posed a great risk for both herself and the baby, in addition to great financial sacrifice. Therefore, Metzi decided to have an abortion:

> If it had been easy for me to stay [in Canada] until my child was born, I would’ve had the baby. … With my pregnancy, I found that the [Canadian] system is very aggressive. Because, god, since I didn’t do things right [to legalize my status] I put myself at great risk. And I think it’s true, the life of a baby, of a child, is worth it, but what about the mother? … You realize that, since you didn’t do things right, your child will have all the rights, and you won’t. … I was going to become an illegal [immigrant] or I was putting myself at risk. So, I decided not to do it.

The barriers to legalizing her status affected Metzi’s possibility of becoming a mother. Other interviewees had also to change their plans of having a family due to the conditions of their
immigrations. One participant, for example did not have an abortion, but she had to postpone her plans to have children until she became a resident, because of lack of medical care. These experiences show how love migrants in Canada must plan their intimate decisions around the bureaucracy of their immigrations.

The women who did have children experienced important changes in their romantic relationships. As one participant explained, in the process of going from being a couple to becoming a family, the relationship moved to a new stage where “you fall in love with your family. It is not so much your husband anymore, but your family, and you can’t imagine life without your family.” While family took a centre stage in participants’ lives, migration also brought some challenges in having to negotiate how best to bring up their children. Raising a family in a binational household required that the participants negotiate how to integrate Mexican culture into the child’s life. While in terms of the couple dynamics, cultural difference created conflicts, when it came to raising children, participants used difference to their advantage: they chose what aspects of the Mexican culture and what aspects of the partner’s culture they wanted to pass on to their children. Eli, for example, came to the following agreement with her husband:

We agreed that the family and cultural aspects, the traditions and the character should be Mexican, and the professional side of the children: their school, level of education and everything should be Canadian so they would not go through the same experience as I had of arriving to a new country with a professional career and being unable to practice your profession.

Participants with Canadian partners constructed their notion of Canadian culture through the differences they encountered at home as well as through popularized media representations of the country. They viewed Canada as a powerful North American nation formed through English and French colonies and built around the idea of multiculturalism. In general, women with non-Mexican partners constructed the culture of the partner through the interactions they had at home, and through generalizations about the partner’s culture that they found in the
media. In this example, Eli understands Canadian culture through the educational and professional opportunities available. And, therefore, she points to the construction of a hybrid culture for her children where they preserve the traditions of Mexico while improving their life opportunities by acquiring Canadian professional experiences and credentials. In raising children with non-Mexican partners, participants also showed a willingness to bring the cultures together in a way that their children would benefit from their bicultural background. Thus, while Eli embraced her Mexican roots, she embraced the advantages of Canadian life.

The women who brought up children with Mexican partners also had to negotiate a bicultural upbringing for their children. However, rather than deciding how best to mix the Mexican culture with the partner’s culture, the focus has been preventing the loss of Mexican culture as the children grow up in the Canadian setting. Daniela, for example, has made it her duty to keep Mexico very present in her home and in her daughter’s life:

I’ve created my own Mexico at home [laughs]. … For example, we try not to lose the traditions from Mexico. I mean, we try to eat Mexican food every day, to keep the traditions, you know that here the meal times are different, so we try to keep the same meal times of Mexico. We watch documentaries and TV from Mexico. … As a parent, your job is to say [to your child] “mom and dad come from this place, and you have Mexican roots. It’s important that you know where you come from, what is there, etcetera.”

As a mother, Daniela has become a cultural promoter of Mexico at home. To her, the concern is not what elements of Canada and Mexico to mix, but to preserve Mexico while her daughter absorbs the language and lifestyle of Canada in her interactions outside the home. Importantly, she stresses the construction of “her” own version of Mexico which, ultimately, is the version that she will pass on to her child. Promoting Mexico at home has also become a way for these women to determine which elements of the culture to preserve and which to dismiss. The language, traditions, history, the centrality of family and, in some cases, the Catholic religion, were some of the elements of Mexican culture that participants considered essential to pass on to their children. Parenting became a new stage in participants’ relationships where they had to negotiate not just the stability of their relationship, but how to
best integrate their children into a culturally diverse setting. For other women, the negotiation of family-making was not so much about when to have children and how to raise them, but the decision not to have them. After moving to Canada, Sandra’s partner Paty suggested the idea of having children. However, Sandra explained that she did not want to become a mother:

I told [Paty]: “If you want to have children, unfortunately you’re wasting your time with me because, ever since I was 18 years old, whether I married a man or a woman, I didn’t want to have children.” And back then I used to say that the husband I found was going to have to share this idea because we weren’t going to last if he asked me to have children just because he wanted to be a dad. I mean, that was never going to work. Why? Because, call it selfishness, call it whatever you want, I don’t want to have children. … Why should I have children? Only because the book of life says that a woman has to make a family and for a family to exist there need to be children. That’s not what family means to me.

In the first chapter, I discussed the centrality of family for Mexican women. Here, Sandra shows how she negotiated the kind of family she wanted to form with Paty: while family was central to the construction of her partnership, she was willing to challenge the heteronormativity of the family by being in a relationship with a woman and forming a family without children.

**Ending the relationship**

Part of the development of participants’ relationships after migration was the decision to end the relationship. Because love migrants’ main motivation to move to Canada was the partner, separating and moving on with their lives was not an easy process; in fact, being in a different country complicated the process of a breakup. Not only did love migrants have few social supports to help them cope with the emotions and the practicalities of ending the relationship, but they were also confronted with the decision to either return to Mexico or to continue building a life in Canada. The conditions in which the separation took place also determined how these women moved forward with their lives as migrants in Canada. Some women ended their relationships soon after moving to the country. Thus, they were not legal residents yet and did not have the social connections or sufficient knowledge of the services that could
support them in this process. Instead, they had to rely largely on themselves to rebuild their lives without the partners that motivated their mobility in the first place. Alma, for example, decided to end her relationship after suffering physical and psychological violence from her Canadian partner. Living in a small town in Ontario, she found little support around her to end the relationship and rebuild her life in this country. Because she did not apply for residency before the relationship ended, part of her struggle was finding a way to stay in the country. When I asked why she wanted to stay in Canada despite the negative experiences she had, she responded that:

Even though I already knew the relationship wasn’t going to work, I had already decided: I’m in Canada, I’ve already told everyone that I won’t live in Mexico any longer, I already gave up everything and sold everything, so it’s better to stay here. Because, anyway, going back to Mexico meant starting all over again: I would have to find where to live, get a car and start getting work. … In any case, I was already bored of Mexico. And, also, the idea of going back, of telling everyone that “oh, I tried to move to Canada but I couldn’t make it, so I’m coming back,” the possibility of failure I think made me feel like, ugh, that’s never going to happen.

The idea of returning to Mexico after a breakup is not an easy consideration for love migrants. Not only because of the emotional difficulty they go through, but because, as Alma mentions, they have already relocated their lives to a new country and, furthermore, they fear being judged for moving countries for a relationship that did not work. Thus, for the women who ended relationships, the prospect of a return came with the overwhelming feeling that they would have to start their lives in Mexico all over again. After breaking up, Alma managed to overcome the difficulties with the help of her acquaintances in Canada. A friend offered a place to stay and temporary work. Alma spent several months informally working while trying to sort out her immigration situation. Eventually she met a man in Canada with whom she fell in love and got engaged. Some days after the engagement, Alama’s tourist visa extension was denied. Thus, she returned to Mexico for two years during which she went through the bureaucratic process to migrate as a spouse. Alama’s story shows how relationship dissolutions do not mark the end of a person’s romantic life but they can mean the start of something new. And, as in her case, it can lead to another process of love migration.
While violence led Alma to end her relationship, Raquel ended hers because of heartbreak. Her decision to stay in Canada was, in fact, a way to create distance from her former Mexican partner Marco. Raquel’s story was somewhat different from those of other participants because, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, she arrived in Canada with the intention to have a one-year experience abroad. When they arrived in the country, Raquel and Marco stayed with Enrique, an old friend of Marco. A few weeks after their arrival, Marco announced he would go back to Mexico, and he promised Raquel he would return to Canada in the summer. Because Raquel had already told her family she would be away for a year, she decided to stay and continue with the trip as planned. After Marco left, Enrique told Raquel that Marco had plotted the trip as a way to make her stay and be “less of a temptation” for him in Mexico, where Marco had a wife and children. At the time of our interview, Raquel admitted she was not entirely sure if this had been Marco’s real intention. Nevertheless, in that moment she felt dismayed, angry, and heartbroken to the extent that she decided to stay in Canada and never see Marco again. After this breakup, Raquel had difficulty finding a way to remake her life in Canada. She did not speak French or English, had no social circles to rely on, no idea with whom to discuss her situation, and the emotions of the breakup were still very present. However, she explained that her anger also gave her the energy to build a life in Canada. In our interview, Raquel confessed that the breakup continues to affect her experiences in this country.

While the experiences of Raquel and Alma occurred in the initial months after moving to Canada, Barbara got divorced after four years in the country. The divorce from her Mexican partner, Ramón, occurred years after going through the motions of getting married, having a child, obtaining a residence permit, and dealing with her partner’s difficult personality. Barbara’s relationship started to decline from the moment they moved to Canada. While the relationship had not been entirely stable in Mexico, in Canada they both had to
deal with the added pressure of being migrants and not having a secure source of income. Since Barbara could not find in Ramón the emotional support and love she was looking for, they had several heated arguments until one day Barbara decided to leave him. She immediately found her own living arrangements, took her daughter with her and, soon after, received Ramón’s request for divorce. In our interview, Barbara admitted that the most difficult aspects of the divorce have been getting used to seeing her daughter only a few days a week, and accepting this separation despite still being in love with Ramón. In the end, she feels that this experience has affected her desire to stay in Canada. The end of her relationship was the start of what to her feels like an emotional instability that has altered how she feels about Canada and her attachment to the country. Although unhappy, she chose to stay because of her daughter. So far, I have shown how the romantic relationships that motivated the participants’ relationships evolved in the process of settling in Canada, in some cases creating unwanted situations and unexpected tensions. However, as we will see next, this was not the only relationship that participants had to negotiate; they also had to focus their effort in building a relationship with their new surroundings.

From feeling like a tourist to feeling like a migrant: negotiating relationships with Canada

After moving to a new country, love migrants not only have to deal with the changes that occur in their intimate relationships, but they must engage in the process of building a relationship with the place they migrated to. Scholars such as Robert Hay (1991, 257) have drawn parallels between the formation of romantic relationships and relationships to place, demonstrating that a migrant’s experience of settlement is a relational process. Even though Hay admits that his argument generalizes romantic relationships, he makes a valid point in emphasizing that, just as with human relationships, the connection and attachment to a place grows gradually according to the degree and quality of the interactions that occur. For the
women I interviewed, the relationship with Canada started during the first trip to this country. In most cases, they did short visits in the months, and even years, preceding their migrations. Other women saw Canada for the first time on the day they arrived to permanently settle in the country. In either case, the first impression produced a temporary feeling of wonder that eventually faded when Canada became their everyday reality. The experiences they had after arriving to settle affected their sense of independence and autonomy, which, as I noted at the beginning of this thesis, was of great importance for these women. In this section, I will address the ways in which participants dealt with the changes and challenges they encountered as they settled in Canada, and the strategies they used to maintain their independence in light of the constraints they found in the new environment.

Experiencing Canada: from landscape to land

John Urry (2007) describes two ways of experiencing place: as landscape and as land. Landscape, he explains, “entails an intangible resource whose definitive feature is a place’s appearance or look” (77). Experiencing a place as landscape is about leisure, relaxation, visual consumption, and tourism. It refers to a relationship with place that is superficial and detached, and which is built around the aesthetic aspects of that place. On the other hand, according to Urry, land represents “a physical, tangible resource that can be ploughed, sown, grazed and built upon. Land is a place of work conceived functionally” (77). Thus, experiencing land requires a deeper connection to place, where we must use all of our senses to experience it. Land is, in other words, a relationship built through interactions and an active construction of place with our hands, our labor, and our participation in the development of such place. Urry argues that in the age of mobility and consumption, land—places of work—has been turned into landscapes—tourist places. Here I want to argue that the love migrants I interviewed experienced Canada first as a landscape and, later on, as land. In other words, while their initial engagement was as tourists or temporary visitors, their
experience changed after arrival when they started a process of making this country their home. Labor and community-building were two essential elements that would have allowed these women to create attachments to the country immediately after moving. Yet, as love migrants, they encountered legal restrictions and barriers to access the labor market and to form a community. Consequently, as I will demonstrate here, these women fell into an in-between state of feeling neither tourists nor residents, but migrants whose belonging and attachment to Canada is conditional and ambivalent.

Participants described their first visit to Canada as a moment filled with joy, excitement, and surprise. These emotions came from the interactions they had with the country as either international students or as tourists; otherwise, these emotions constituted the immediate reaction they had upon arriving to live in the country, as they absorbed the newness and atmosphere of what would become their permanent home. Difference played a central role in creating positive memories and impressions of the country during these first moments. Daniela, for example, explained that: “the first time I visited [Canada], I really liked it because it was also the first time I left Mexico. I liked the tranquillity, people are different, everything is different, so I liked it a lot.” Like Daniela, participants met Canada with a sense of wonder that made them approach this place openly (Ahmed 2015, 189). Some of them described “falling in love” with the country. They recalled admiring the modernity of the cities and the tranquility of its neighborhoods and small towns, marvelling at the greenery surrounding the towns and the easy access to nature, as well as the mix of people residing in the cities and the friendliness with which they felt welcomed. As Ollinca admitted, however, this initial feeling was a temporary one:

When I first arrived [to Canada] and I saw [Montreal], it was all so pretty … it was like “ah, yes, the city love.” And oh! you’re a tourist, everything is beautiful and organized, and there are cute little flowers, and cute little streets, and everything is in French, everything is beautiful and I liked it. But it’s just that, right? A tourist feeling that you have when you get to see something that you’d never seen before.
This observation captures very well the emotions that other participants expressed as they recalled how they approached Canada as visitors. Ollinca calls this a “tourist feeling” which, much like Urry’s concept of landscape, she considers to be something temporary and ephemeral that is based on the beauty and excitement of the first encounter. Therefore, the first impressions of Canada were based on the visual characteristics of that place, on the enjoyment of encountering difference by immersing themselves in a new language, a new culture, a new order of things, and, more importantly, on the feeling that they were in the country only temporarily. Prior to the first trips, participants had already heard about Canada either from images and articles in the media, or from their own partners. Yet, this tourist feeling and their overall experiences in this country changed as they attempted to settle in. In fact, the experiences that they had in the months following their arrivals turned the “tourist feeling” into what I call a “migrant feeling,” which refers both to the conditionality of their belonging and to the inability to experience Canada as fully without permanent residency.

Although the participants expected to find some initial difficulties upon moving to Canada, they mostly hoped to set roots in the country and make it their home with relative ease. They felt motivated by the idea of building a life with their partners, and confident about their ability to succeed in this country. In other words, they hoped to create a sense of belonging. Belonging, according to Nira Yuval-Davis (2006, 197), is a concept that refers to the emotional attachment we create with a place and/or community, it is about “feeling ‘at home’ and…about feeling ‘safe’;” however, participants did not feel at home in Canada right away. Initially, the feeling that they were visitors lingered as they attempted to orient and familiarize themselves with their new surroundings. As the months passed by, the “tourist feeling” faded and gave way to a desire to engage with their surrounding in a deeper and more meaningful way. These women had a great desire to find employment or other purposeful activities that could keep them occupied and bring them closer to other people so,
in turn, they could make friendships and start building a community of trust. In a study on
refugees and place-making, Lems (2014, 303) found that the two elements that allowed her
interviewees to create an attachment to place after being displaced were working toward
building a home and connecting with a community so they could become “part of a wider
whole and inhabit [that] place socially.” Labour and community were also prominent topics
in the narratives of the women I interviewed. However, as we will see next, the conditions of
their migrations affected their ability to take part in meaningful activities, build a community
of friends, feel independent and, consequently, to establish a sense of belonging.

Conditional residents, conditional belongings

Rather than constructing a sense of belonging, during the initial months in Canada, the
women who migrated as spouses found themselves distanced and detached from the country,
despite their willingness to live in this place. After submitting their applications for
residency, these participants were subject to the Conditional Permanent Residence (CPR)
regulation that I described in the previous chapter. The women in this situation spent between
1.5 and 2 years waiting for an answer from the Canadian government. During the initial 10
months of this period, they were not allowed to work or study, and they could not leave the
country until their applications were processed. This significant period of time placed these
women in a complicated position: they were no longer tourists nor did they have full resident
rights yet. At the same time, those first years were a critical period in which they attempted to
make of Canada their home, create meaningful connections, and adjust to the cultural,
linguistic and geographic differences. Due to the conditionality of their immigration status
and the restrictions that came with it, their belonging became equally conditional. Tania
described her first years in Canada as “horrible” and “difficult,” because the fact that she
could not work or study determined how she lived other aspects of her life:
The almost one year and a half that I waited for my residence permit was very difficult. From missing my family to not having economic freedom to do anything, because if I—, I did have money because Farid would give me some, obviously, but I didn’t really have anyone to hang out with. I mean, I arrived and all the friends I had here from when I studied were either back in Mexico or back in their countries. I didn’t know anyone, so I didn’t even have anyone to talk to, or to go out with. I was alone, yes alone … And when [Farid] had days off work, I would obviously go out with him and stuff, but [migrating] was a very, very stressful process, and very boring. I feel that, oh! I became so grumpy. I would get angry about everything: if I had already cleaned the house and someone left some dirty dishes, I would be like ugh! I would explode.

Being unable to work or study not only affected Tania’s routine, but also her ability to socialize, her independence, and her mood. Like Tania, other women emphasized how important it was for them to keep active and feel like their lives had a purpose. Some of them recalled comments from partners, family members, and friends saying that they were “lucky” that they did not need to work or study, and instead received financial support from their partners. Yet, this kind of comment demonstrates a misunderstanding of women’s priorities.

Because participants who migrated as spouses were not allowed to work or study, they found themselves spending the majority of their time at home. In fact, some participants described this as a period of “learning how to become a housewife.” As middle-class women whose expectation was to build a successful career and develop professionally, having to change their routines from being very active and mobile to being mostly at home was a difficult transition. In the previous chapter, I discussed how the CPR regulation views cross-border couples from a heteronormative perspective. Indeed, since participants were not allowed to work, they focused their attention and energies on the home. In doing so, they unintentionally took the role of the home-makers while their partners became the providers. However it should be noted that this unintentional division of labor occurred for participants in heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Despite the fact these women were not necessarily looking to adopt these gender roles, they accepted the situation so long as they knew it was only temporary. During this period, they focused on doing activities like cleaning the house, managing the couple’s expenses, learning how to cook, and decorating their apartments and houses to make them more “homey.” More than simple house chores, these
activities allowed participants to control their immediate surroundings in ways they could not control the situations they encountered outside the home. In other words, they worked to make the home theirs and, consequently, to start feeling they were making a place for themselves in this country. At the same time, the home also became an isolating place, because it restricted their interactions and experiences. In a study of Mexican women and everyday mobility, Soto (2013, 6) found that “going out” of the house represented a key spatial practice for women to break the routine and engage with the outside world. In Canada, “going out” both represented the unpredictability of facing the unknown, and a desirable activity that connected these women with their neighborhoods and cities, and gave them a better sense of the place they now lived in. Yet, as Tania mentions, the lack of financial independence, lack of social connections to motivate outings, and the language barriers restricted their autonomy to decide when, where, and how to move around their city or town and, in some cases, prevented them from moving too far from home. This restricted their mobility and independence, in turn, influenced the depth of interactions they had with their surroundings. Thus, while their autonomy in Mexico had allowed these women to meet their partners and move to a new country, after migrating they found their lives restricted in ways they had not experienced in Mexico.

During the period of CPR, participants were only allowed to engage in unpaid and voluntary work. Some participants decided to search for voluntary positions working in community centres, schools, looking after children, organizing events, among others. According to some women, these activities relieved them from the monotony of being at home every day and through them they could meet other people, practice their English and/or French, and explore new neighborhoods and areas of their towns. Despite the fact that the CPR conditions stipulated that applicants could engage in voluntary work while they waited for a resolution, it was not always a feasible option. Suggesting unpaid labour as meaningful
activity for spousal applicants comes with the assumption that there is financial stability in the household. The women who migrated with Mexican partners, for example, described going through difficult financial situations after arriving to Canada; therefore, more than having an activity for the sake of being active, these women wanted to feel productive, earn money, and contribute to the household. As a result, some of them turned to what is colloquially known in Canada as work “for cash”—i.e. undeclared work—as nannies and cleaners. Participants with non-Mexican partners also considered the possibility of finding paid work; however, they found resistance from their partners who warned they should not engage in illegal work; thus, they abstained from doing so. Those who did find undeclared work, however, had the advantage of being able to create a routine and integrate into the rhythm of life in Canada sooner than the others. They were also able to gain a sense of independence, improve their self-esteem, and give direction to their lives in this country. Another strategy that some participants found to undermine the restrictions of the CPR regulation, was working online. One participant recalled working for an e-newsletter during this period, an activity that “saved” her during those months of inactivity. Family was another important form of activity. Earlier I argued that home-making placed women in gender roles they did not necessarily want to fulfil permanently. Yet, as Constable (2003, 65) points out, although Western feminists tend to portray wage work as the ideal of every liberated woman, depending on the sociocultural context, home work can also be desirable and fulfilling. In this sample, there were participants who had already developed professional careers in Mexico, and for whom the idea of focusing full-time on the home and the family represented liberation, because, as one participant explained, it gave them a break from a stressful and absorbing work life. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, balancing work/studies and family was essential for these Mexican women. Therefore, dedicating all their time to their careers or to the family was not ideal. They were in constant search of a balance.
Finding community in cities and small towns

At the same time that participants had restricted access to employment, education, unpaid and leisure activities, and, as a consequence, to making social connections, they also had to interact with the community in the neighborhoods and towns they lived in. These interactions had positive and negative sides to them, and they influenced how welcome they felt in Canada. The women in this study initially settled either in cities like Toronto and Montreal or in small towns in Ontario, Alberta, and Quebec. There were some differences between how women felt in cities versus small towns. For instance, in the city, women felt they had more space to move around and the activities and services available made them feel like they could easily meet people and make friendships. By comparison, participants living in small towns described initially feeling out of place because they arrived in tight-knit communities. Some women that arrived in small towns in Ontario commented that they could not find official guidance or services for immigrants. One participant explained that, whenever she asked for immigrant services “people would tell me that there are none because they don’t want immigrants here.”

Cecilia was one of the few participants who experienced settlement in a city and in a small town. Initially, Cecilia arrived in Toronto where she lived with her Canadian partner in a predominantly white neighbourhood. She found difficulty making connections in her neighbourhood and in the surrounding communities because, she noticed, each one seemed to comprise a specific ethnic group she did not belong to:

In the area I used to live in, in that street, there were only whites … but they are like, everyone stays in their homes, and they are not the kind of people who would close down a street and have a party. Not at all! I mean, they don’t do anything like that. … [In Toronto] you find that on this side live the Chinese, on this other the Indians, and here the people from Pakistan. So, they are very closed groups, everyone is in their group, right? And, it was that, each group was very closed, until I found some Mexican women and they became my friends. They taught me how to move around Toronto, how to use the bus, and all those things.
Here, Cecilia touches on the difficulty of finding a feeling of belonging in an ethnically diverse community. Her words describe her search for a community that would include her and where she could feel some sense of familiarity. The lack of a community also affected how she moved in space because until she found a group of Mexican friends she had not known how to navigate the city. Cecilia’s case exemplifies how friendships are not only important as a community of care but, they can be essential to build a sense of autonomy in the new country. Indeed, Cecilia explained that, after making these friendships, she “fell in love with Toronto and its multiculturalism.” However, two years later, Cecilia and her husband moved to a small town, and, this time, she found great difficulty in making friends due to the racism prevalent in the community:

The town is very small, very traditional. And by traditional, I mean that ninety-something percent of the population are white Anglos. They are not very used to seeing immigrants, or if they are it’s… different. Um, it’s something very new to them. So, I try striking a conversation with them, and when they hear my accent it’s… I mean, you can tell, their body language, is like, it’s so shocking. At the beginning, I was very shocked, but later I learned how to be assertive and ask: “is there a problem or something?” And no, no, no, That was… well, and there aren’t many Latinos [in the community].

This second experience contrasts with the “love” she felt for Toronto. The lack of ethnic diversity and the racism she experienced made it difficult for Cecilia to cope with life in a small town. Her story evidences how the treatment that migrants receive from the communities in which they dwell impacts the emotional connection they have with a country, as well as their sense of belonging and migration experiences. Similarly, it shows that, even when a migrant creates attachment to a place, mobility within the same country can affect that attachment. In the interview, Cecilia for example describes the move from city to small town as a new period of adjustment, and explained that now, two years after moving to the small town, she has “gotten used” to the attitudes of the people in her town.

While participants such as Cecilia had negative experiences living in small towns, others found them to be great places to make a close community of friends. In small towns, the population size made it easier to maintain social connections, and nourish them to create
strong emotional ties. Some participants were able to connect with the Latin American community soon after moving to a small town. They found that the Latinos organized frequent events and cultural activities, and they met regularly. Cultural communities like the Latinos were important to form solidarity and support against experiences like the ones that Cecilia had. Beyond the Latino community, participants were also able to make friendships through the connections that their partners had in the community. As a spiritual leader, Liliana’s husband, Matt, had a large network of friends and acquaintances in the community, and many of them gladly welcomed Liliana and extended their support and friendship. Aside from this community, Liliana also found a significant friendship in Rose, an English woman who moved to Canada during World War II as a war bride. Rose was a great support during Liliana’s transition to Canada because, more than a friend, she became a mentor:

[Rose] helped me in the process of understanding myself better, of arriving with a child, with a baby. She would often tell me “Liliana, I arrived in a country where they speak the same language as me, but they have a different culture.” She used to tell me that people won’t easily open their doors to you or, well, trust you, right? Especially if you arrive to a tiny town where everyone knows each other, where everyone is each other’s cousin. [Rose said:] “they have to get to know you, they have to see who you are.”

The knowledge and experiences that Rose passed on were essential to make Liliana feel part of the community and to help her adapt to her new surroundings. Above all, it is important to highlight that this knowledge-sharing happened between women who both migrated for romantic relationships but in different decades and from different points of departure. Living in a small town and living in a city had their pros and cons. At times the experiences were negative and deterred women from wanting to set roots in Canada; yet, other times, the people they met and the significant relationships they created helped them make space for themselves and feel part of Canada.

Reconfiguring life after migration

Moving to Canada significantly altered these women’s life plans, especially since they moved to a different country in search of a future where they could fulfil their personal goals and
enjoy the company of a loving partner. Yet, migration forced these women to change their life plans. In their stories, the participants explained the frustration of coping with the years of restrictive immigration regulations and the uncertainty of their stay in Canada. However, they also shared their hopes and expectations for their lives in this country: they described the ways in which they planned to reconfigure their lives to find a place in Canadian society. In other words, these women have to continuously negotiate their place and belonging.

Obtaining their immigration papers was a first step to reconsider how to organize their lives and find new plans and goals for their lives. In fact, one participant commented that, when she received her resident permit, she felt that she could “have a life again.” Whether as a spouse or through other route, the residence permit allowed the participants to find stable employment, access school—for women in the province of Quebec, this meant accessing government-sponsored French lessons—, being able to visit Mexico, and feel certainty and control over their lives. At the same time, they had to adapt their original life plans to find self-fulfilment and a sense of belonging to Canada. The main aspect these women adapted was their employment aspirations. Because they faced problems validating their credentials in Canada, or they could not find employment opportunities that matched their professional skills, some women opted for modifying their career prospects. After becoming a resident, Daniela, who studied nursing in Mexico found work as a dental assistant. Although the job was very different to the employment she had aspired to have, she accepted the offer and was pleased to move on from an unstable job as a nanny to a more permanent position in a dental office. Looking back, however, she feels her migration “cut short” her initial dreams and aspirations:

If I’m honest with you, I know that economically we are better here [in Canada], but I feel that I cut my life short by coming here. I mean, my career—, it’s as if when I decided to come I said “screw everything! I love him, I love him too much. I mean, I don’t care about [my career],” but now that time has passed, I realize that many of my dreams, like doing a speciality in nursing, were cut short.
Daniela’s words echo the sentiment of other women who had also imagined a positive future in Canada, and while they made great efforts to find satisfaction in the new environment, they also recognized the sacrifices that they made and which only became evident once they moved.

Other women found that moving to Canada provided an opportunity to reconfigure their lives in a positive way. Emilia, for example, explained that after going through some difficult months adapting to life in a small town in Quebec where she could barely communicate because of her lack of a knowledge of French, she found educational opportunities she did not have in Mexico. She mentioned eagerly learning French as well as joining courses to do manual work, getting recognition for her innovative projects and, in recent years, starting a PhD. In the interview, she mentioned how proud she felt of her achievements. Like Emilia, other women also shared their plans to complete short professional courses to improve their career prospects, attend language lessons to strengthen their grasp of French and/or English, setting up their own businesses to become more economically self-sufficient, engaging in leisure activities they used to do in Mexico, and finding a supportive group of friends. In all, this planned reconfiguration shows how these women acted against the constraints they encountered and how they reclaimed their independence once again.

Ana, for example, feels she is still struggling to settle in Canada. Yet, in the interview, she shared her hopes for her future in Canada:

I hope to feel more adjusted, I hope to also feel much more part of this place. It’s like every year that goes by you feel you belong more, right? Because, at the beginning you say “no, well I’ll never feel Canadian because I am always Mexican.” But no, I mean, when you’re here and you live here, you get through problems, all of this, you start to feel like you are part of something. So, I think that I will feel part of something. Um, actually I will become a different person: I see myself now finally having a career, spending time with my daughter, feeling more adapted, with more friends, um, feeling like I am more part of something here and less part of Mexico. I feel it’s a process in which, little by little, you have to let go, you know? You must let go of Mexico and of everything you had there and it can’t happen from one day to the other, or from one year
Ana’s words describe the emotional struggle the women in this study have undergone when they became migrants in Canada. However, she also emphasizes the hope of reaching a point where they feel they belong, of independence and, above all, the happy future that they set out to build when they left Mexico.

**Conclusion**

At the beginning of this thesis, I pointed out that the love migrants in this study moved to Canada in search of a future where they could continue to pursue their personal life plans while having a loving partner. Yet, the experiences I discussed in this chapter show the challenges they encountered to achieve their goals. Not only did these love migrants find that the stability of their romantic relationships is not a constant, that it must be re-negotiated all the time, but they also encountered the difficulty of making a home in a place where their status as immigrants sets them apart from other Canadian residents. Thus they had to modify some of their plans or give them up altogether in the process of making Canada their home.

At the same time, their experiences also reveal that, in spite of the challenges they found in Canada, the desire to continue having an autonomous and self-fulfilling life remains. And it is this conviction that motivates their efforts to find stability in their lives in Canada, even if they must end their romantic relationships, even if they have to completely change their life plans. After all, as I have argued throughout this thesis, love migrations are about intimacy and romance, as well as the desire for an independent life.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I have explored some of the experiences of Mexican women who migrated to Canada motivated by a romantic attachment. In discussing their love stories I found that, for Mexican middle-class women such as the ones I interviewed for this project, the search for a romantic partner goes hand in hand with the search for autonomy and self-fulfilment. At the same time, their experiences of migrating to Canada show the impact that crossing borders has on love migrants’ independent lives and romantic relationships. I have shown how the process of leaving Mexico and arriving in Canada was emotionally conflicting and also life-changing. The participants became subject to the rules and regulations of a Canadian immigration system that viewed them as a “threat.” Hence, in their initial years they found their lives restricted in ways they had not expected nor had they experienced in Mexico. Settling in Canada, on the other hand, meant making a home by finding stability in their relationships and with their new surroundings. And, as I showed, this was a process of negotiation and self-determination, where the participants continue to make important efforts to construct a life that is fulfilling and where they can balance the different elements that matter to them—including a career, family, and romantic love. We can, therefore conclude that love migrations are an expression of Mexican women’s autonomy and conviction to find balance in their lives.

Recommendations for future research

This thesis has allowed us to explore the phenomenon of love migration from the perspective of Mexican women. To conclude, I would like to highlight some main findings and suggest some potential avenues for future research in this area:

• Firstly, the stories of the women in this thesis have demonstrated that emotions matter in the study of migration, not only as a motivation for the mobility, but as an inherent part of
migrant’s journey. In this research, I found that romantic love was the emotion that motivated the participants’ move to Canada; however, other emotions were prominent in their stories and occupied significant parts of the discussions in this thesis. In addition to romantic love, the conflicting emotions of departure, and the feelings associated to a place—such belonging and not belonging—all reveal how critical emotions are in motivating migrations and making sense of these experiences.

- The stories discussed in this thesis are diverse and unique, which made for a challenging writing process. Yet, this diversity shows that there is no single love migration experience, but a great variety of situations, hopes, and expectations that motivate the decision to migrate for a romantic relationship. Therefore, the study of love migration has the potential to grow beyond the experiences of Mexican woman; it could address how people of other nationalities, races, gender identities, and sexual orientations, might experience this kind of mobility in the context of Canada.

- One of the main findings of this study is the role of immigration policy in leading love migrants into marriage. While it is clear that governments like the Canadian one have not fully actualized their immigration policies to match current trends in the formation of romantic relationships—or are unwilling to do so— it is important to further explore the implications that these policies have on love migrants.

- Finally, in the process of interviewing, writing about, and talking to love migrants, I concluded that, to move forward with the research on love migration, it would be beneficial to adopt participatory methodologies aimed at creating a community among love migrants. In the weeks prior to the completion of this thesis, I came across two Facebook communities which have shown me the importance and need to create connections among love migrants. One group is called “Mexican women in Montreal”, and it invites Mexican women—whether love migrants or not—to share stories, advice,
and conversations that specifically deal women’s experiences. The second group titled “Mexican women with foreign romantic partners,” is open to any Mexican woman who has a romantic relationship of any type with a non-Mexican partner. In this case, the members are not necessarily migrants; however, the goal is to create solidarity, support, and understanding of the experience of sharing intimacy with a person from a different nationality and culture. In my interaction with these groups I have observed the way these women create a supportive environment to cope with, and make sense of, the experiences of migration and cross-border intimacy, respectively. I believe that research on love migration should also facilitate the creation of community by allowing the participants to interact with each other, to exchange and discuss their experiences, to create solidarity, and to continue to support each other once the research is over. My hope is that any future projects in this area take advantage of participatory methodologies and focus groups to create a community of love migrants. I believe that such an approach has the potential to create richer conversations and a research environment that might be as beneficial for the participants as it is for the researcher.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix 1. General Research Ethics Board Letter of Approval

June 22, 2017

Miss Ilse Natalia Equihua Bracho
Master’s Student
Cultural Studies
Program Queen’s
University Kingston,
ON, K7L 3N6

Dear Miss Equihua Bracho:

RE: Amendment for your study entitled: GCUL-056-16 “Ni de aquí, ni de allá”: Narratives of Identities of Mexican Immigrants in Canada; TRAQ # 6018180

Thank you for submitting your amendment requesting to add Dr. Audrey Kobayashi to the Project Team as Co- Supervisor.

By this letter, you have ethics approval for this change and the file has been updated accordingly. Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

John Freeman, Ph.D.
Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c.: Dr. Petra Fachinger and Dr. Audrey Kobayashi, Co-Supervisors
Appendix 2. Letter of Information

Narraciones de mujeres mexicanas que migraron a Canadá por amor

Información sobre el proyecto

Se te invita a participar en una investigación acerca de la experiencia de migrar a Canadá por una relación romántica. El objetivo de este trabajo es conocer la razón que te motivó a venir a Canadá y entender cómo ha sido para ti dejar México, llegar a Canadá y hacer una vida aquí.

Criterios para participar

Para participar deberás cumplir con los siguientes criterios:

- Ser mujer mexicana de entre 20 y 60 años de edad
- Haber llegado a Canadá para: a) continuar un noviazgo/relación abierta o b) casarte con alguien que residía en Canadá al momento de tu migración
- Identificar dicha relación como una de las razones principales de tu migración a Canadá
- La pareja por la cual migraste puede ser de cualquier nacionalidad
- No serán elegibles aquellas mujeres casadas con su pareja antes de llegar a vivir a Canadá, a menos que dicho matrimonio haya sido parte del proceso de migración, o una condición familiar o legal para facilitar dicho proceso.

La investigación

Esta investigación consiste en una entrevista con una duración de aproximadamente 2 horas. En ella abordaremos la historia de tu llegada a Canadá y las experiencias que consideras más significativas sobre este proceso. Realizaremos la entrevista el día, hora y lugar de tu preferencia, los cuales acordaremos por adelantado. Antes de iniciar la entrevista recibirás una “Carta de consentimiento informado”, donde podrás dar o negar tu permiso para grabar tus respuestas por medio de una grabadora de audio.

Segunda entrevista opcional: al final de la entrevista, hablaremos sobre la posibilidad de una segunda entrevista, la cual será completamente opcional.

Beneficios: no existen beneficios directos de esta investigación. Sin embargo, tu participación contribuirá al entendimiento de los procesos, experiencias y emociones relacionados con las migraciones por amor. Tus respuestas también darán información importante sobre cómo es para las mujeres mexicanas migrar a Canadá. Es posible que esta información pueda algún día utilizarse para la creación de políticas públicas que faciliten los procesos migratorios de mujeres, específicamente de aquellas que llegan a un nuevo país por una relación romántica.

Compensación: no se ofrece compensación por participar en esta investigación, ¡pero agradezco mucho tu participación!

Participación

Tu participación en esta investigación es totalmente voluntaria y opcional. Durante la entrevista es posible que toquemos temas sensibles para ti. Sin embargo, puedes rehusarte a contestar cualquiera de las preguntas, sólo debes decirlo y pasaremos a la siguiente.

Consentimiento: para mantener un registro de tu aceptación a participar, te pediré que firmes una “Carta de consentimiento informado” con tu nombre y la fecha.
Retiro de la entrevista: puedes detener esta entrevista en cualquier momento y/o decidir retirarte del proyecto por completo. Si decides retirarte, también podrás decidir si quieres retirar y/o modificar cualquiera de tus respuestas, o incluso dar permiso para el uso de las respuestas que hayas dado hasta ese momento.

Confidencialidad

Toda la información que proporciones, incluyendo datos demográficos (como edad, profesión, lugar de nacimiento, etc.) así como las respuestas que des durante la entrevista serán completamente confidenciales. Todas las grabaciones, notas y transcripciones sobre las respuestas que proporcionas quedarán resguardadas en carpetas y archivos protegidos bajo contraseña y dentro de una base de datos a la cual sólo yo, la Investigadora, tendré acceso. Al final de la entrevista tendrás la oportunidad de revisar, modificar y/o retirar cualquiera de tus respuestas si así lo deseas. Tendrás hasta un mes después de terminar esta entrevista para solicitar modificaciones.

Publicación: tus respuestas serán parte de la tesis escrita que resulte de este proyecto, así como de cualquier publicación o actividades relacionadas con dicha tesis. Es posible que cite tus respuestas textualmente dentro de esta tesis. Sin embargo, no habrá ninguna conexión directa entre tus respuestas y tu identidad. Esto quiere decir que cualquier información que pudiera revelar tu identidad será modificada o excluida de la tesis con el fin de proteger tu privacidad. Asimismo, utilizaré pseudónimos para referirme a ti y a cualquier otra participante durante el proceso completo de esta tesis y dentro de cualquier publicación o actividad de difusión que se relacione con este trabajo.

La investigadora

Este proyecto está a cargo de Natalia Equihua, quien realiza su maestría en Estudios Culturales en la universidad Queen’s University en Kingston, Ontario. Si deseas más información o tienes alguna duda respecto a este proyecto, puedes contactarme por correo electrónico: 15ineb@queensu.ca o por teléfono: 438-350-4484.

Este proyecto está bajo la supervisión de la Profesora Petra Fachinger, Departamento de Literatura Inglesa, Queen’s University y la Profesora Audrey Kobayashi, Departamento de Geografía y Planeación, Queen’s University.

Este estudio recibió aprobación ética de acuerdo con los principios recomendados por los Lineamientos Éticos Canadienses y las políticas de Queen’s University. Si usted tiene alguna duda respecto a la ética de su participación en este estudio o sobre la forma en que se llevó a cabo el mismo, por favor póngase en contacto con el Jefe del Comité General de Ética en la Investigación llamando al 613-533-6081 o enviando un correo electrónico a chair.GREB@queensu.ca.
Appendix 3. Letter of Informed Consent

Carta de Consentimiento Informado

Nombre del proyecto: “Narraciones de mujeres mexicanas que migraron a Canadá por amor”

Investigadora: Natalia Equihua

He leído la hoja de “Información sobre el proyecto” y acepto participar en esta entrevista. Entiendo el propósito de este proyecto y todas mis dudas han sido aclaradas satisfactoriamente. Comprendo que algunas de mis respuestas podrán aparecer textualmente en la tesis final que resulte de este proyecto, y que aquellas respuestas que pudieran revelar mi identidad serán modificadas o excluidas del proyecto con el fin de proteger mi privacidad.

Entiendo que puedo rehusarme a responder cualquiera de las preguntas que se incluyen en esta entrevista, que mi participación en este proyecto es totalmente voluntaria, y que puedo detener la entrevista en cualquier momento. Asimismo, puedo retirar o cambiar mis respuestas durante la entrevista y hasta un mes después de finalizar la misma.

Mi firma en este documento indica que acepto participar en esta entrevista en la cual hablaremos sobre mis experiencias de migración a Canadá.

Nombre del (la) participante: ____________________________________

Firma del (la) participante: ___________________ _______________________

Fecha: ____________________________________________________________

* Estás de acuerdo con que esta entrevista sea grabada por medio de una grabadora de audio? (Cualquier grabación quedará resguarda en un dispositivo protegido por contraseña al cual sólo la Investigadora tendrá acceso. Ninguna grabación será publicada en forma alguna):

☐ Sí ☐ No
Appendix 4. Interview Schedule

1. Demographic information:
   Age, Place of origin in Mexico, Profession, Number of years in Canada, Conjugal status, Partner’s name, Partner’s place of birth, Children.

2. Relationship:
   - How did you meet your partner?
     (Initial expectations of the relationship, moment when it became serious, decision to move to Canada, feelings about having a non-Mexican partner, if applicable).

3. Departure:
   - What do you remember about the day you left Mexico?
     (Feelings about leaving, preparations, reaction of family and friends, expectations of life in Canada).

4. Migratory process:
   - What legal process did you have to undergo/are undergoing to stay in Canada?
     (Feelings about the process, outcome, marriage in order to legalize status).

5. Arrival:
   - How was your life in Canada been so far?
     (initial feelings, memorable experiences of first month, initial life plans).

6. Experiences at home:
   - How has life been with your partner in Canada?
     (Feelings about the relationship, differences with other relationships in Mexico, challenges during the first years, things that she has enjoyed, life with children if any, relationship with partner’s family).

7. Other experiences:
   - How has it been for you to make a life here?
     (Feelings about living here, prospect of making of Canada a permanent home, things that she has enjoyed about living here).

8. Transnational links:
   - How has your relationship with your family and friends changed since you moved here?
     (Communication methods, frequency, meaning of these relationships, visits from family).

9. Mexico:
   - How has it been for you to be far from Mexico?
     (things that she misses from the country, activities done when missing Mexico, visits to Mexico, meaning of Mexican culture for her life in a foreign country).

10. Future:
    - What plans do you have for the life you’re making in Canada?
      (Expectations, plans to move back to Mexico, preparation to accomplish those plans).
Eres Mexicana?

Llegaste a Canadá por una relación amorosa?

Busco mujeres para un estudio sobre migraciones por amor!

- Si eres mexicana y llegaste a Canadá por un noviazgo, relación abierta o matrimonio con alguien que reside aquí, me gustaría entrevistarte.
- La entrevista durará aproximadamente 2 horas.
- En ella hablaremos sobre tu relación y cómo ha sido para ti dejar México, llegar a Canadá y hacer una vida aquí.
- Tu pareja puede ser de cualquier nacionalidad.
- Debes vivir en Montreal o zonas aledañas para poder realizar la entrevista.

Interesada?

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