

LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO MIGRATE FOR LOVE: IMAGINING EUROPEAN MEN AS IDEAL PARTNERS

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Introduction

The possibility of starting and maintaining intimacy across great distances has significantly increased with the contemporary facility to travel and study abroad as well as to communicate across national borders (King 2002, Parreñas 2005, Baldassar/Gabaccia 2011). Love is today a central factor in the project and decision to move elsewhere. Love migration often implies a bi-national marriage. In countries like Switzerland, more than 36% of the marriages that were concluded in 2012 involved a Swiss-born person and a person born abroad. The numbers of women who immigrate to Switzerland for a bi-national marriage are much higher than the numbers of men who immigrate for the same reasons (FSO 2013).

The phenomenon of bi-national marriages raises two questions. First of all, how can one understand love in contemporary mobile societies? Scholars have observed that the Western ideal of romantic love is steadily gaining more and more currency internationally. The idea that "romantic love cannot be bought and sold, love cannot be calculated, it is mysterious, true and deep, spontaneous and compelling" is at the centre of such ideals (Lindholm 2006: 5). Further, marriage itself should only be for the sake of romantic love, and anything less would be a sham. Researchers contend that in a postmodern social world, and in response to an increasing individualism, equality and autonomy, romantic love is being rapidly displaced (e.g. Giddens 1992). In this paper we argue that love needs to be

understood as embedded in a complex system of ideals such as, for example, the ideal of egalitarian love. In the context of increasingly mobile individuals the possibility of moving to live in a new location expands the possibility of reaching such ideals.

Secondly, the issue of love and geographical mobility raises the question of how to understand contemporary love migration. There are relatively few studies that examine in detail the migration trajectories, discourses and practices of love migrants (Cahill 1990; Albert et al 2000; Piper/Roces 2003; Riaño/Baghdadi 2007; Roca 2007; Mai/King 2009). Love migration has sometimes been interpreted as a “survival strategy” (e.g. Truong/Del Rosario). In this perspective, women from the global South use bi-national marriages as a deliberate strategy to immigrate to countries of the global North and to improve their own standard of living as well as their families. Bi-national marriages would follow a typical path: a European man travels to a country in the South where he meets a woman “to import” and she subsequently leaves her own country to join her future husband and give love in exchange for a better standard of living. In reality, the motives, trajectories and experiences of individuals who migrate for love reasons are much more complex (Riaño 2011a). Further authors (Johnson, 2007; Constable, 2004) have argued that explaining love migrants’ decision to migrate as an enforced response to economic hardship is too narrow a perspective. They challenge Eurocentric ideas about the passive and desperate bride who escapes from poverty and backwardness to a wealthy and advanced West. They also argue for a nuanced understanding of the variety of factors that come into play when women migrate, such as transnational fantasies and imaginings of marriage, tradition, and modernity. Other researchers call for female migration, including love migrants, to be understood as the desire to escape the oppressive patriarchal structures in which women live (e.g. Kofman *et al*, 2000). Yet other scholars consider that the social, economic and political asymmetries that exist between men and women in the countries of origin create favourable conditions for women to want to migrate (Kofman & Raghuram 2015). Finally, some further authors interpret women’s migration as a means of overcoming local tensions between the sexes, which are ultimately caused by changing gender roles (Riaño, 2003, Riaño 2011a; Waldis, 2001). Unfortunately, the extent to which gender inequalities in the countries of origin affect women’s decision to move across borders as love migrants remains insufficiently understood (Riaño 2011b). Further, a question that has not been addressed so far is what happens when love, i.e. romantic feelings, crosses national borders? What happens to romantic love when the other components

attached to love, such as aspirations of egalitarian love are not fulfilled? This is particularly relevant for the case of love migrants as the social context for the practice of love considerably changes when crossing national and socio-cultural borders.

Further, studies have shown that women's transnational imaginations of "other" places, and the opportunities that they associate with those places, also play an important role in the decision to migrate. "Imagination" has become an important concept to understand in today's globalised world. For Appadurai (1996), the imagination works as a powerful force in shaping human action: "The image, the imagined, the imaginary—these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice. [...] [T]he imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labour and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order" (ibid). Gregory (1994) uses the term "geographical imaginations" to refer to the diversity of perspectives, positions, and subjectivities embodied in human understandings of place, space and landscape. Understanding how we imagine the world and how that imagination influences our actions, such as the decision of whether to migrate or not, where to migrate and whether to contract a bi-national marriage or not, is thus a task of central importance for researchers.

From the above we conclude that we need to adopt a more differentiated perspective towards love migration that examines in detail the multiplicity of motivations, itineraries, and experiences of love migrants and the role that gender aspirations and geographical imaginations play in their migratory processes. The aim of this article is to contribute to filling this research gap by examining the migration histories of 25 women originating from seven different Latin American countries¹ who settled in Switzerland for reasons of bi-national marriage with a Swiss citizen. All of the women have tertiary education², are between 25 and 50 years of age and live in the German speaking Cantons of Switzerland. Before moving to Switzerland, they lived in middle to large urban centres in Latin America and were professionally active. We studied their migration histories through biographical interviews, which consisted

¹ Mexico, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia

² They carried out studies in social sciences, economics, business management, law, technical drawing, arts, architecture, engineering, medicine, odontology and physics.

of a detailed narration where each individual woman had the possibility of reviewing and recalling her past life and of reflecting on her decision to migrate as well as on her migration experiences. This method was complemented by MINGA workshops, a specific type of participatory workshop that we designed for this project (Riaño 2012). It consists of an interactive process whereby a group of six migrant women gets together with the researchers; each woman narrates her own migration history and thereafter the group analyses each individual story. Thus, women are not simply “informants”; they expand their knowledge by being active participants in the analysis of their own migration histories and those of the others. Further, MINGA workshops create an atmosphere of trust among participants, which makes it possible to discuss the role that love plays in their migration biographies. Twelve such workshops were conducted in the cities of Bern, Aarau and Zürich.

This chapter has five parts. The first part introduces the main patterns of women’s migration trajectories. In part two, the women’s aspiration of equality in a partnership and their imaginations of European men as ideal partners are presented. Part three describes how women accept to follow their Swiss partners across borders despite the emancipatory discourses that they represent in part two. Part four shows that women’s ideals of equality are shattered in Switzerland and part five wraps up the arguments presented in the chapter.

Migration trajectories

All of the women that are considered in this study became permanent migrants to Switzerland for reasons of a bi-national marriage. None of the interviewed women had planned a permanent migration, and they first considered a permanent move well after they had fallen in love. Love is thus extremely meaningful in changing the women’s biographies and shaping their migratory projects. In most cases the bi-national relationship sparks a process of reflection among women regarding their life projects and confronts them with the decision to permanently move to Switzerland.

Many women expressed how difficult the decision to leave their home countries was; they were obviously torn between their professional futures at home and the possibility of leading married lives abroad. As Swiss immigration policies do not allow love migrants to live together with their partners without being married, such a regulation places women in a difficult situation as they see themselves constrained to contract a marital relationship at a faster pace than they desire. This difficulty is expressed in the migration movements of the women: only a third of the women took

one direct step to Switzerland, whereas the others moved back and forth over the years before finally settling in Switzerland.

An examination of the women's geographies of migration shows two patterns:

1. Uni-directional model: These are women who—in most cases—meet their future husbands in their own countries of residence. Swiss men, or other men permanently residing in Switzerland, invite the women to come and join them in Switzerland. In this case, migration consists of only one step, directly from their countries to Switzerland.
2. Multi-directional model: An initial migration for reasons of tourism or study, which is followed by permanent migration for reasons of bi-national marriage. Women initially leave their countries of residence to travel or study in a North American or European country. During this time they meet their future husbands, in some cases Swiss citizens and in other cases permanent residents of Switzerland. The newly formed transnational couples are confronted with the decision of where to live if they are to stay together. Love means that the members of the couple would like to experience living together. Interestingly, it is always the women that make the compromise of leaving their home countries to join their partners in Switzerland. Thus, women who originally left their countries as students or tourists become marriage migrants. This type of migration may consist of several steps as many women first move to one (or several) intermediary countries before settling definitively in Switzerland.

Idealised imaginations of European men

Unequal gender relations and positive representations of Europe, and of Europeans, are a recurrent theme in women's narratives of migration. When women talk about their reasons for entering a relationship with a European, two main issues emerge: on the one hand, their dissatisfaction with unequal gender relations in their countries of origin and, at the same time, their idealised views of European men as partners.

I think it was above all a matter of trust. When I met Heinz I felt lucky to meet such an honest person...Not like Bolivian men...always with their dishonest proposals...even from married men! Even from teaching staff at

University! It was very important for me to feel that I could trust Heinz. I could not trust men in Bolivia (Azucena Müller³, Sociologist, Bolivia).

The above quote reveals an important component of love: trust. Trust is the basis for love. Interestingly, trust has a cultural component. Owing to her own experiences, Azucena Müller cannot trust Bolivian men. Her relationship with a Swiss partner shows that he is the opposite of what she has experienced with men in Bolivia. As trust emerges she can unfold love for her Swiss partner.

He supported me professionally a lot; he helped me a lot to finish my thesis. That wins your heart you know...that he shows interest in your intellectual production; that aspect was essential for me. A man that respects you the way you are. There was a strong intellectual exchange between us that I could not find in a man from Venezuela (Gloria Meier, International Relations, Venezuela).

This quote reveals that support and respect are further important components of love. In Gloria Meier's view, Venezuelan men do not respect their female partners and are also not willing to support them with their intellectual production. Again, her experience with a Swiss man shows the opposite. Feeling that he respects her and supports her intellectual aspirations, she is willing to let a love relationship with him further develop.

I always thought that I would marry a foreigner; maybe a European because Europeans are not as patriarchal, not as macho as the majority of our [Dominican] men. I was always an independent woman. I was not willing to bow myself to a constraining relationship; a relationship dominated by the stupid and irrational jealousy of a Dominican man. I thought of my husband being a European, I do not know where I had that image from, but I thought that Europeans were more advanced in that respect; that you could have a much more egalitarian relationship with them (Yolanda Büchli, Psychologist, Dominican Republic).

Finally, as described above, equality emerges as a central component of love. Over the past few generations Latin American women have gained increased access to professional activity and today many are in positions of power in business, government and politics; however, such transformations have not been coupled with changes in traditional representations of masculinity and femininity. The increased participation

³ All names are fictitious to protect the identity of the women.

of women in the labour market is a result of economic necessity (low salaries and high living costs demand two salaries per household); nevertheless, the idea that women are responsible for household duties has not changed and in many places the ideology of machismo continues to prevail. The statements above illustrate Latin American women's frustration with the ideology of machismo. In macho ideology men are not primarily interested in the personal qualities of a woman but in her as an object of sexual pleasure. Latin American masculinity is often defined by the so-called *donjuanismo* whereby a true man is one who is able to seduce many women. This means that women are primarily seen as sexual targets. In their desire to have a relationship with a man who respects them for what they are, and who is willing to share household chores, many Latin American women idealise European men as having those qualities, which are lacking in Latin American men. In this context, idealising and choosing a European as a partner can be interpreted as a personal strategy for redefining gender roles. Love is thus associated with the idea of equality in terms of gender roles.

Further, the concept of geographical imaginations appears with as much importance to understand love migration. Lola's statement below illustrates how imaginations about the qualities that specific places in the world may have, as well as the people who live there, and the social, economic or political opportunities that those places may open up are significant in the decision of whether to incur a love relationship with a foreign man, and ultimately marry him:

[Recalling the time when she first met her Swiss husband]

I remember my cousin came to visit me with a Swiss friend of his who was visiting Venezuela... I went with them on a short holiday. I had overcome the antipathy of the first moment because it turned out that he was not a gringo. I had a barrier against imperialism. I could never imagine being married to a North American. But my cousin said: 'no, he is not a gringo, he is not an imperialist, he is a Swiss, he is a European'. Ah, that's very good I thought. And then after a while it sparked between us (Lola Schindler, Historian, Venezuela).

It is also interesting to note from women's narratives that some Swiss men also have idealised imaginations of "Latin American women". Fantasy works best at a distance, and it seems that it is not uncommon for some Swiss men to idealise Latin American women as "cheerful, soft, loving and docile", qualities which they apparently miss in some Swiss women. The love ideals of Swiss men are thus associated with women's cheerfulness and docility. As the statements below show such generalising

representations clearly do not correspond to reality and clash with women's actual wish for equality in a relationship (see also Echarte Fuentes-Kieffer 2004).

Women always say that they like intelligent men. But my husband does not demand intelligence from a woman. He had a romantic idea about Latin American women: that they are loving and have a soft character. I think he had an idealistic view that does not correspond to reality...And he accepted that he had an image of Latin American women as a devoted 'Madonna'...a mythical idea....And, of course, my actual way of being clashes with that image he had (Yolanda Büchli, Psychologist, Dominican Republic).

The above quote shows that, contrary to her ideals, Yolanda Büchli's Swiss partner does not associate love with equality between the genders. The clash in love ideals between the interviewed Latin American women and their Swiss partners is further exposed in the quote below. Lucía Fankhauser's Swiss partner idealises Latin American women because they will supposedly fulfil his love aspirations: a woman who is cheerful and always partying. As time reveals that she cannot fulfil such aspirations because she has a different character her Swiss husband becomes disappointed in her:

I think he [her husband] is disappointed with me...in part because I am not the South American who is always smiling, who likes to dance and enjoy life. I was already like that in Peru: I am very demanding with myself. I set out to do a job and I have to do it within the day otherwise I think I will have double as much work tomorrow. I behave like a machine; I find no time to relax. Sometimes he says that I am 'too' European...or 'too' Swiss. And I don't know what it is to be 'too' European or 'too' Swiss (Lucía Fankhauser, Journalist, Peru).

At this point, it is interesting to also note that it is not only the love imaginaries of the interviewed Latin American women that play a role in their migratory projects to ultimately marry but also the geographical imaginaries of their own families. As the case below illustrates, both families, the Mexican woman's and the Swiss man's, have specific geographical imaginaries of their partners' countries, which strongly influence the decision of the woman migrating to Switzerland to join her future Swiss husband rather than her husband migrating to Mexico:

My mother used to say that she hoped I married a foreigner because the situation in Mexico was very difficult. [She said] Mexico was a pretty

country but the political situation was very difficult: there was much corruption, a difficult economic situation and growing insecurity. Somehow she idealised life in other countries: United States or somewhere else...[...] I met him in a musical tour group in United States. We fell in love and, of course, he had no idea about Mexico and I really did not know anything about Switzerland. ...From the beginning I said I would like him to go to Mexico and started looking for work possibilities for him. His family, however, was not as open as mine to him leaving Switzerland. They said to him: go for three months, learn Spanish and then come back. My family on the contrary said: Switzerland...that's good. Just go, no problem...if he is a good guy...why not (Marina Brugger, International marketing, Mexico).

The above quote gives a hint as to why it is so that among two individuals who love each other, but live in separate geographical locations, it is more common that the Latin American woman moves to join her Swiss partner in Switzerland, rather than the other way around.

Accepting the idea that women follow men

Bi-national couples consist of partners that live in different countries, and sooner or later, they are faced with the question of where to continue their future. The answer inevitably results in migration for at least one of the partners and, in the case of all the women interviewed in this paper, the woman is the one who migrates. Why are women the ones who migrate? The examples below show, again, that when women are confronted with the problem of who should migrate, they end up following the men. Love is clearly deeply interrelated with gender meanings. Giving priority to the husband's career is indeed a constant in the stories of many of the women in this study. Many of the women are not necessarily willing to migrate, but because they give priority to their husband's career and they think the husband will have better opportunities in Switzerland, they end up moving there. Thus, all the bi-national couples in this study settled in Switzerland, independently of the fact whether the Swiss husband had a job there or not.

I remember... the personnel chief was Australian and he chose me for a job in Australia. Happily, I told Jörg [my future Swiss husband]: Do you know what? When I finish my studies [in England] I am going to Australia. What? He said. Do I still have to wait? I wanted Jörg to come with me to Australia. But he said that was impossible because he liked his job in Switzerland very much and would therefore not leave it. And then he said: Why don't you come to Switzerland for a holiday? When I came here he

had organised everything for me to stay in Switzerland. He had already enrolled me in a German course and had already bought a train pass for me. I had to accept. I stayed (Rosana Ahmann, Hotel Management, Nicaragua).

After some years of being together the question came up of where we should live....either he comes to Peru or I go to Switzerland...By that time he had been promoted to General Secretary of the X party in Switzerland....I was afraid that if he came to Peru I would have a good job but he would not....and then he would be frustrated (Lucía Fankhauser, Journalist, Peru).

The quotes below show the intricacy of love and ideals of feminine identity. Professional involvement has become a focus of personal identity for many Latin American women. After some years of professional involvement, however, women start to become torn between the desire to pursue their careers and to have a family. In many Latin American countries ideals of femininity represent women through motherhood and young age: “a true woman is one who has children”/“only young women are desirable partners”. The tension between professional advancement and motherhood increases with age: already in their early thirties many women start feeling the pressure that they will not be able to find a partner in their countries of residence, not be able to have children and will end up not having a partner and a family. Lucia and Lola’s statements illustrate such fears and how getting together with a foreign partner could have been, consciously or unconsciously, a means of overcoming society's pressure to become mothers. Love and the possibility of having a family are a further central component of love. A love relationship with a foreigner made it possible for Lucia Fankhauser to fulfil the prevalent ideals of feminine identity in Venezuela, despite her "advanced" age (32) for having a family.

[...]I felt my life was in Peru. I had a good job, was earning well, was doing what I liked to do and had advanced professionally. But I felt lonely...and started to think that I was not so young anymore... We women are always with the pressure of the biological clock...and then I met Hans and fell in love with him (Lucía Fankhauser, Journalist, Peru).

[On her professional life in Venezuela] I felt very, very satisfied. I had a job at University, I was doing what I liked, I was getting paid for it... what else could I want? But I saw myself getting old in that environment... sometimes I was thinking... well, if somebody turned up I would not be so alone... Because at the age of thirty you start to think about it and you start feeling very alone.[...][...][...]And I think that we Latin American women, even

though our professional lives are so important for us, we are like Susanita, in the Mafalda comics, we dream about having children and all that... Yes, I was dreaming of having children.[...][...] And then I told him [her Swiss husband] I love you and we are going to establish a home. I already know what I want and I want to have children. He was 44 years old and I had just turned 32; thus it was for us like our last option (Lola Schindler, Historian, Venezuela).

The above examples demonstrated that traditional ideas about women's ideal role and behaviour in relation to love, such as "women should follow men", "men's careers are more important than women's" and "a true woman is one who has children" are deeply imbedded in the minds of many of the women, despite the fact that their professional advancement is very important for them. In consequence, one may argue that 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.

Shattered dreams of love equality

The preceding narratives have shown that when women leave their home countries, their migration strategies are characterised by both opposition as well as compliance with prevailing gender relations. On the one hand, they oppose the unequal gender relations that prevail in their countries; on the other hand, they reproduce "traditional" female identity and gender roles by following men, giving priority to their careers and having children as a central life project. What happens when they arrive in their new society? To what extent can they realise their dream of love equality? And to what extent is that realisation influenced by women's contradictory aspirations and the new country's framework of gender relations?

The narratives below are an example to illustrate that, after living in Switzerland for a while, some women in bi-national relationships discover that although their Swiss husbands do not behave like the *machos* of their countries of origin, Swiss society is characterised by persistent unequal gender structures. This situation is characterised by women's unequal access to the labour-market, a lack of child-care facilities, school schedules which constrain one of the parents to stay at home, the deeply embedded idea that it is the woman's task to look after her children; and the dominance of men in positions of economic and political power. Many immigrant women are shocked to find out that Switzerland is "no paradise" for women with children since combining a family and a career is a real challenge. In terms of the possibilities available to them, many

immigrant women realise that Switzerland compares negatively rather than positively to their country of origin. Lola and Yolanda's statements exemplify such disappointment:

Switzerland is quite a backward country in terms of nursery availability. In Venezuela, or in any other Latin American country, even factories have a small nursery where female employees or workers can put their children while they are working. But Switzerland is very underdeveloped in that sense. It seems that this country orients itself by the idea that men do the paid work and women stay at home looking after the children, and therefore, in theory, no nurseries are necessary (Lola Schindler, Journalist, Venezuela).

[When I married] The only thing I did not count on...how naive of me... was that marrying a Swiss automatically meant burying my professional dreams (Yolanda Büchli, Psychologist, Dominican Republic).

Further, Lola Schindler's statement below illustrates that her dream of achieving love equality by marrying a Swiss person and by migrating to Switzerland is far from having been fulfilled. Besides, love across boundaries brings with itself feelings of sadness and frustration:

I have said that nine years ago [when she came to Switzerland] I started undergoing a process of 'de-intellectualisation' [loosing intellectual ability]. And I think all of us who have changed our professional status for that of exclusively being housewives are in that same process. It is a difficult period, with other types of compensations but with many contradictions. Because if I think of the situation I am in, I'm like a minor who does not contribute anything and who depends on that person [her Swiss husband]. I love him very much but I depend on him like a minor who depends on their father or mother for both basic and accessory things. Therefore, things have changed a lot for me (Lola Schindler, Historian, Venezuela).

From the above narratives it can be concluded that women see their dreams of love equality shattered because they have to change their former professional status for that of being exclusively housewives, and become economically dependent on their husbands. Besides, although not present in the women's narratives, they also become legally dependent on their husbands because according to Swiss immigration law, individuals who enter the country as marriage migrants obtain their right to residence only after three years of successful marriage.

Clearly, the idealised vision that Latin American women had of Switzerland's gender relations and professional opportunities did not

correspond to reality. Their ideals of love become in practice a tie that limits their freedom to develop their professional lives. At the same time, in response to the frustration they face for not being able to fulfil their professional expectations, they mainly blame the structure of gender relations in Switzerland. While it is true that gender relations in Switzerland are still far from being able to facilitate gender equality, the question needs to be raised if prior to the women's arrival to Switzerland there were not already some contradictions in their aspirations regarding love equality. It could be argued that the seed for unequal gender relations is already planted when a woman decides to follow her future Swiss husband, give priority to his career, put her career on hold, and define the family (husband and children) as central in her migration project. Therefore, "traditional" ideals of love and gender roles would, directly or indirectly, be set: the Swiss man as breadwinner and the migrant woman as homemaker.

Conclusions: Opposing traditional gender roles?

The narratives of the interviewed Latin American women reveal the important components of love: trust, support, respect, and equality. In their desire to have a relationship with a man who fulfils those aspirations, women idealise European men as "non patriarchal", which makes them in their view more desirable partners than Latin American men. The women's aspiration to equality in a partnership, and their idealised views of European men, become important drivers in their decision to conclude a bi-national marriage and become love migrants. The analysis of the women's biographies also shows that their dreams of equality are often shattered in Switzerland. On the one hand, they find themselves in a situation of power inequality with their Swiss partners as they become legally and economically dependent on them; on the other, they are subject in Switzerland to great difficulties to reconcile family and career, which hinders their wish to professionally advance.

The studied biographies show that when love migrants move they are constructing and reconstructing gender, and that gender shapes their migration patterns (cf. Raghuram 2004). The differences that societies construct between men and women regarding ideal gender roles have a direct implication on love migrants' decision to migrate and on their ability to professionally integrate in their country of destination. The values internalised by Latin American women and by their Swiss husbands as well as by their families regarding adequate behaviours for

women and for men, explain in great part why it is women who leave their country to join their Swiss partners rather than the other way around. At the same time it seems a paradox that the interviewed Latin American women express their discontent with gender relations in their countries of origin and at the same time reproduce traditional gender roles when they migrate for love by accepting to follow their husbands, putting their careers on hold and giving priority to the men's career. Interestingly, women struggle between new and traditional ideals of love. The hypothesis can be formulated if love migration cannot be understood as both a way of opposing "traditional" gender roles and also as a way of accepting and maintaining them for the sake of love.

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