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***Transnational Same-Sex Couples:
Negotiating Intimacy and Home(s) 'Here'
and 'There'***

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Acknowledgements

*'So, I took the road less travelled by
And I barely made it out alive
Through the darkness somehow, I survived
Tough love, I knew it from the start
Deep down in the depth
Of my rebel heart'*

- Madonna, from 'Rebel Heart', 2015

*'I am on a lonely road and
I am traveling, traveling, traveling, traveling
Looking for something, what can it be?'*

- Joni Mitchell, from 'All I Want', 1971

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which transnational same-sex couples construe and experience transnational migration, intimacy, and home. The study was initially born out of the need to contribute to the young, but growing body of scholarly work in relation to queer migration studies. For long, the figure of 'the migrant' was founded on heterosexual terms only, thus impeding any possibility of exploring the lives of those with non-normative gender and sexual identities. During the last two decades or so, new scholarship has tried to alter this picture, arguing for a more inclusive assessment of global migration. This project aims to further the scholarly conversations in this regard, but it also wishes to go beyond the traditional economic and political spheres in which the migrant is usually placed in; hence, it promotes a study of migration that is also preoccupied with the intimate and emotional life of LGBT+/queer migrants.

In this sense, this research is interested in how 12 transnational same-sex couples (that are also binational) understand and practice intimate life and home. Indeed, examining the life of these couples in migration offers a unique opportunity to delve into the intimate and domestic dimensions of transnational migration, and therefore, to show how the research participants actively negotiated and sustained family life and a sense of belonging in today's rapidly changing and globalising world. The 'transnational' component will be key across this thesis, as it enables the possibility of understanding the couples' different movements, attachments, networking and (emotional and material) practices that explicate and buttress their migratory journeys.

The study was carried through the use of ethnographic techniques, namely, narrative interviewing, observation, and the construction of material culture narratives at the participants' home(s). This methodological combination allowed for an in-depth and careful exploration of the individual and coupled biographies of the research participants. Particularly, this thesis illustrates how working with material culture brings richness and additional depth to empirical data, as well as it provides new opportunities for creativity and interaction with research participants.

In the end, this research project chiefly aims to provide gay men, lesbians, and other non-heterosexuals in transnational relationships additional tools to reflect on their lives, sense of belonging, citizenship status, and the value that is politically and socially bestowed on to their relationships, families and overall personal commitments. Indeed, I wish to bring attention to the intimate side of migration; to the fact that migrants, like the ones in this research, have meaningful and on-going personal and interpersonal attachments and commitments. This is why I argue that studying this can be key to a deeper and better understanding of the phenomenon of migration in the 21st Century.

Key words: *transnationalism, same-sex intimacies, queer migration, mobility, intimacy, family, home, material culture, narratives, ethnography.*

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1 Introduction

1.1 Beginnings: a thesis project is born

About six years ago, I decided to leave my home country, Colombia, and embark on an academic career here in the UK. At the time, I managed to convince everyone – friends, parents, sister, relatives, and curious others – that my aspirations were only intellectual and career-driven, but in truth, I was also secretly looking forward to finally, finding a life partner. Since then, my academic journey and personal life have been greatly intertwined; the search for a ‘significant other’, evolved into an on-going emotional and intellectual dialogue about the meaning of love, belonging and intimacy. In addition to that, my reasonably ‘mobile life’ – having lived in Colombia, the USA, Argentina, Mexico, and the UK – have provided new perspectives and frameworks for those intimate conversations, to the point where I knew I had to go out, and share my questions, assumptions, and doubts with the rest of the world.

This research project was conceived between the years of 2012 and 2013. At the time, I was living my life between the UK and Mexico, trying to sustain a long-distance relationship, and deciding how to proceed in relation to my professional future. Then, one hot summer night in Mexico City, I chose to share my thoughts (mostly, frustrations) about my relationship and my future with a friend of mine, and after listening to me, he just replied: ‘This is exactly the kind of research that the world needs, my friend. Thousands go through what you are going through, but why and how? I wonder’. Needless to say, I took my friend’s advice and my research proposal was born.

In short, I envisioned a thesis examining the ways in which transnational same-sex couples construed and experienced migration, home, and intimacy. Though this initial inquiry remains at the centre of my research project today, my experience while doing fieldwork, the interaction with the research participants and, of course, academic (and at times not so academic) literature have also shaped and changed my study along the way. These changes, I always thought, were indications of 'good research', as it meant that I was actively and reflexively engaging with my data and with the project, overall. Thus, before I move on to describing the aims, questions, and general overview of my research, I would like to continue, in the next section of this introduction, to a brief discussion on how the socio-political context of the last few years heavily shaped and informed the progress and ambitions of this research.

1.2 Setting the stage: arriving at the intersection between transnational migration and sexuality

This thesis was completed over the course of three and a half intense and challenging years in the West, politically and socially speaking. Migration, in particular, has been at the centrepiece of political and economic debates; the Syrian migration crisis across Europe, and the toughening of border controls and anti-immigration rules have posed dramatic challenges, not only in socio-economic terms, but also in those that pertain to the intimate and the familial. As an example of the latter, in 2012, the UK Government introduced a minimum income requirement of £18,600 per annum that UK citizens and settled residents have to meet in order to bring their non-EEA spouse or partner to the country. In spite of the criticism and a legal case against the measure, in early 2017 the British Supreme Court sustained that the measure is lawful, though it also declared that it

causes 'significant hardship', particularly in relation to the welfare of minors involved (Sharman, 2017).

Equally, Brexit has been a recent and important political development. This event, the referendum and its outcome, have triggered meaningful as well as worrying conversations surrounding migration, intimate life and citizenship. After all, Brexit will produce fundamental legal and political consequences in terms of family life and overall relationality between Britons and Continental Europe. In this sense, recent press articles discussing Brexit have already noted its impact on intimate life; one piece, for instance, discussed a British woman's fears over being able to keep her family together post-Brexit, as her partner is French (Freeman, 2017). A second article (O'Carroll, 2017) told the story of a Scottish woman who, while also trying to keep her family together, accused Theresa May of ignoring the voices of Britons married to EU citizens. Evidently, intimacy and migration are at a tense and crucial moment in European history; though this thesis does not look at Brexit in particular, it does offer a thorough examination of the intimate challenges faced by transnational same-sex couples who live, make decisions, and operate in these seemingly difficult and hostile times and context. Furthermore, a number of the British participants in this project were partnered with citizens from European countries like Italy and Finland. Likewise, two of the couples here are European - non-British, but reside in the UK as a result of the EU's stance on free movement. Although Brexit had not happened by the time I carried out the fieldwork for this project (between 2014 and 2015), Brexit will undoubtedly pose a significant change in the conception and stability of their relationships towards the future.

Since this project focuses on the lives of 12 transnational migrant same-sex couples in the West, it is relevant to discuss the current socio-cultural context of LGBTQ people in this area of the world; after all, important LGBTQ-related issues have been at the centre of political and social discussions recently. In many ways, there exists more visibility, and arguably, more acceptability towards homosexuals

and transgender people in countries across Europe and the Americas. However, I hesitate when I argue that because advances have come at varying and questioning degrees; authors like Weeks (2007), for example, have discussed the profound but unfinished 'revolution' transforming intimate lives and sexual diversity. More so, Weeks' (2007: 5) work emphasises the necessary precautions that we should have when assessing such transformations and progress, as 'we have to weigh in the balance the gains and losses'. Hence, while same-sex marriage has been approved and come into force in recent years in countries like the UK (excluding Northern Ireland), the USA, Canada, Colombia and Argentina, the setbacks in human rights and public policy toward sectors of the LGBTQ community have also been significant. In February 2017, for instance, the Trump Administration decided to revoke Barack Obama's landmark guidelines to public schools, which allowed transgender students to use the bathrooms of their choice (Trotta, 2017), thus reversing years of activism and substantial political gains for transgender people in the USA. Certainly, '[With] public opinion growing ever more tolerant towards gay Americans, partisans on right and left are making the once obscure field of transgender rights a place for culture-war battles' (The Economist, 2017: 38). Hence, these recent events have brought rather complex, contradictory and ambivalent outcomes for the livelihoods of LGBTQs.

It is in the midst of this complicated social and political context that I have thought, re-thought, researched and written this project. Being a gay man and a migrant myself, I felt the necessity to reflect on some of the ways in which these issues, namely, migration and sexuality, intersected, and how that intersection has brought about important matters related to how people in today's globalised world understand and experience intimacy and home. To this end, I decided to concentrate on the lives of twelve transnational same-sex couples in order to examine how they construed and experienced their migratory journeys, intimate lives, but also how they defined and eventually built a sense of home. The term

'transnational', I decided, fully captured the magnitude and enactments of these couples as they experienced different levels of migration, long-distance intimacy, travels, nostalgia, and sense of belonging. A term like 'migrant same-sex couples' (used by Ahlstedt, 2016 and King-O'Riain, 2016) would have been insufficient, in my opinion, as it fails to illustrate the movements, multiple attachments, networking and (emotional and material) practices that underpin and indeed sustain globalisation and human mobility today. Moreover, transnationalism, or such sense of multiplicity in relation to identity, emotions, practices and belonging, were at the core of the stories told by these same-sex couples.

The reader should also note that while I refer to the research participants as 'same-sex couples', a good number of scholars in gender and sexuality (McLaughlin et al, 2012), geography of sexualities (Rooke, 2010), gay domestic cultures (Potvin, 2014) and even in migration studies (Fortier, 2001 and 2003; Manalansan, 2006; Rouhani, 2015) opt for the term 'queer' in their analyses¹. For this reason, in order to deliver an effective review and critique of this literature, I chose to embrace and engage with this word across the theoretical discussions in my thesis, when necessary. However, when commenting on my empirical data, I have preferred not to use the word 'queer' and instead refer to the participants as 'same-sex' couples. My general stance on 'queer' is that it is an expression that has been reclaimed and discussed by academics and *for* academics (mostly in disciplines in the Arts and Humanities). In this sense, I see it as an important analytical tool (particularly in relation to the study of power relations (Green, 2014)), but also relatively 'high-brow', and out of touch with, or unrepresentative of, the empirical and identitarian

¹ The term 'queer(s)' is usually used by authors in queer theory and critical studies to refer broadly to people who live outside (or not only in terms) of heterosexuality, and also to those who fail to comply with normative gender expectations. In this sense, Luibhéid (2008: 169) wrote that 'many scholars instead deploy the term *queer* to acknowledge that all identity categories are burdened by legacies that must be interrogated, do not map neatly across time and space, and become transformed through circulation within specific, unequally situated local, regional, national, and transnational circuits. Moreover, these transformations cannot be understood within progressive, unilinear, and Eurocentric models.'

experiences of the average person. For example, none of the study's participants referred to themselves as 'queer'; instead, they used identities like gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Ultimately, this is what convinced me that using 'same-sex couples' instead of 'queer couples' provided a more straightforward, and unproblematic term referring to the research informants and the data obtained in my encounters with them.

1.3 Project aims and questions

This thesis invites reflection and discussion of a wide range of complex and important issues. Chiefly, it explores the ways in which transnational same-sex couples construe and experience transnational migration, intimacy and home. In this way, firstly, I will insist on the importance of considering how participants 'understood' but also how they 'practiced' or engaged with these three matters; hence, in each one of the empirical chapters (chapters 4-6), I examined how these couples negotiated the distance between their aspirations and actual realities of their journeys in relation to migration, intimacy and home.

Likewise, I aim to examine how a diversity of understandings and expectations surrounding intimacy and home interact in the transnational and domestic realms. By doing this, hopefully my work will provide gay men, lesbians and other non-heterosexuals in binational relationships additional tools to reflect on their lives, their belongings, their citizenship status, and the value that is politically and socially bestowed on to their relationships, families and overall personal commitments. Indeed, I wish to bring attention to the intimate side of migration; to the fact that migrants, like the ones in this research, have meaningful and on-going personal and interpersonal attachments and commitments. This is why I argue that studying this can be key to a deeper and better understanding of the

phenomenon of migration in the 21st Century. Previous studies exploring the life and experiences of migrant couples, and same-sex couples, in particular, do exist; in this sense, I want to highlight those by Ahlstedt (2016), Gorman-Murray (2009) and King-O’Riain (2016). While these pieces are informative in-depth examinations of migrant same-sex couples (King-O’Riain’s study includes, both, same sex and heterosexual couples), their focus is largely limited to the couple in itself as the unit of analysis, thus providing little information of the relationships and intimacy that these people, as individuals and also as couples, create/perform/sustain with ‘others’, namely family, friends, local communities, etc. Hence, though dealing with important issues in relation to belonging, love and emotions in transnational migration, the authors fall short in their examination of transnationalism and its dynamics on a wider scale, and this thesis aims to fill this gap.

Finally, this thesis also aims to bring attention to the relations and associations that these couples create and sustain with other people (kin, non-kin) as they navigate through transnational migration. Investigating these connections is important because they expose the complex intimate intersections and negotiations conveyed in transnational migration beyond the coupled unit. The point is that these (transnational) same-sex couples do not operate in a vacuum; their choices, negotiations, practices and understandings in relation to home and intimacy are deeply defined and influenced by their interaction and relationships with ‘others’. The narratives and analyses in this thesis aim to grasp the full scope of this.

Some key questions have laid the foundations for the project’s aims. Likewise, not only do they reflect my intellectual ambitions, but they also demand a certain scholarly commitment to reflexivity and intersectional analysis of contemporary intimate and mobile lives. In this sense, I started this research by asking how transnational same-sex couples experience intimate life and home across different locations. After all, given the mobile nature of their lives, it is only fair to enquire

on the ways they understand and negotiate intimacy (as couples, but also in relation to others, such as friends and kin) and home.

This then led me to wonder if non-heterosexuality shaped and/or affected the participants' ideas, experiences, and ideals in relation to migration, home, and intimacy. Literature on queer migration and diaspora (Fortier, 2003; Rouhani, 2015), as well as the one on queer domesticities (Cook, 2014), illustrate the non-linearity and ambivalence present in the relationship between queer subjects and the idea of home; therefore, I ask how do the participants in this research 'expect' and actually experience the concept of home when they migrate? In this sense, I'm interested in exploring the multiple negotiations – with the past and future, the intimate and public, the imaginary and real – that queer migrants face, and how identity, culture and context inform that.

Also, when talking about intimate life in transnational fields it is pertinent to interrogate how transnational same-sex partners negotiate friendships and familial attachments and commitments between two (or more) different countries. As I already made it clear, one of the main aims of this project involves the recognition and discussion of migrants' intimate life, beyond the economic and political adjectives attached to their circumstances. Hence, I am curious about the ways in which they sustain their relationships with friends and kin across time and geographical distance.

Finally, in my pursuit to add layers of analysis, complexity, but also creativity to my research, I chose to include the use of material culture narratives at the participants' homes. But now, does this method really add anything new to this thesis? More suggestively, how do material culture narratives enhance or contribute to the overall data produced in this research, and to sociological research overall? Certainly, I wish to find out how this technique could not only enhance my

ethnographic observations and analysis, but how it can also sharpen sociology's own research practices and inquiries of social life.

1.4 Project overview

In this thesis, I will analyse the intersections between migration, sexuality, intimate life and 'feeling at home' through the narratives of 12 transnational (and binational) same-sex couples. Largely, by considering the individual and coupled biographies of the same-sex partners in question, it seeks to understand the meanings and practices that the participants in this study attach to their experiences with the concepts of transnational migration, intimacy, and home. To achieve this, I followed an ethnographical approach for my data collection, which included narrative interviewing, participant observation, and most interestingly, the creation of material culture narratives at the participants' home(s). Throughout the different stages followed to the completion of this work, I embraced reflexivity as a guiding tool of 'good' research and analysis, and I also adhered to queer and feminist epistemologies to enhance such endeavour. Below, I provide a general overview of the three main themes in this work; the data chapters in this thesis were structured around these three key themes, and will be explored in depth in due course.

1.4.1 Migration and sexuality: exposing intersections

This project was born out of awareness that 'non-heterosexuality' was not being fully explored in migration studies, particularly in relation to transnationalism. Previous work intersecting migration and sexuality does exist, and I will engage

with it in time in the literature review chapter (2.2). In particular, the work of Cantú (2009), Gorman-Murray (2009) Mai and King (2009) were central to the beginning of my exploration of how personal relationships, emotions, and love, specifically, shaped non-heterosexual migration. As Mai and King (2009) pointed out, migration scholars tend to overly focus on the economic factors and signifiers in migration, while altogether ignoring the emotional and intimate aspects that also influence and shape international migration.

Hence, this study, specifically in chapter 4, provides insight into the emotional and personal landscapes of a group of transnational same-sex couples. I considered the 'coupled' unit, instead of individuals, as it provided an opportunity to explore different ideas, discourses, and practices of intimacy and display at first hand (In chapter 3, section 3.5.1.2, I explain my reasoning behind interviewing couples together, further). Additionally, I must mention that I sought to examine transnational same-sex couples that were binational only, with the objective of analysing different and negotiated cultural dynamics 'at home'. I also took this posture as an opportunity to explore the legal and geographical challenges that these couples experience along the way to be physically together.

1.4.2 From the sexuality of migration to the intimacy of migration

Intimacy is a key matter in this research project. As I mentioned before, societies in the developed and developing world have been experiencing a change of attitude, or transformation, as Weeks (2007) called it, in relation to gay and lesbian couples in the public sphere. Sociological research on intimacies and personal life has discussed this matter along the way, exploring topics as varied as the narratives of relationships and friendships for non-heterosexuals (Weston, 1991; Weeks et al., 2001), biographical experiences of same-sex partners who have

legally formalised their unions (Heaphy et al., 2013), or broader concerns in relation to queer families – queer families of colour, activism and queer parenting, for example (Bernstein and Reimann, 2001; Gabb, 2001). Hence, adding to that growing list of ‘queer’ themes, I considered the importance of researching intimacy – coupled same-sex intimacy, to be precise – ‘on the move’.

Undeniably, people are “‘on the move”, and arguably as never before’ (Elliot and Urry, 2010: ix), and the transnational same-sex couples in this research are an example of that. Intimacy for them, as for many other ‘mobile lives’ today, is understood and performed in different ways, and increasingly, with the aid of technology. Also, as I mentioned in the second section of this introduction, countries like the USA and the UK have embarked on political projects aiming to legally and/or materially restrict globalising trends, including human migration. Therefore, it is reasonable to enquire on how these actions pose a direct threat to intimacy today. Though the history of the state regulating and challenging marriage, particularly between its citizens and non-citizens is as old as the idea of the state itself (Brandzel, 2005; Cott, 1998), I bring this issue of intimacy back into the academic conversation today, as I position it in the context of 21st Century globalisation and transnational migration.

Historically, conversations about immigrants, and their migratory experience, have focused mainly on the economic, political, or social factors, while altogether ignoring the intimate and emotional affectations to their lives. Naturally, there are exceptions to this approach; scholars like Ahmed et al (2003), Brah (1996), Skrbiš (2008) and Svašek (2008) have investigated the emotional (Baldassar, 2008), familial and belonging-related issues experienced by migrants. In late 2016, I came across an article in *The Economist* (2016), which denounced globalisation’s opponents, along with their protectionist and nativist tactics across Europe and the United States. While the piece (unsurprisingly) had nothing to say in terms of intimacy and human relatedness, it was this particular topical absence that made

me realise of the importance of this research: of telling and discussing the stories of the transnational same-sex couples who participated in this study. Indeed, some of them included narratives of long distance love, visa application arrangements, strategic planning and much patience in order to 'make it work'. Also, these couples shared stories of their intimate lives with friends and relatives across different geographies, and as it will be evident throughout this thesis, my take on intimacy is unabashedly inclusive, as I account for the participants' coupled relationship, but also, and more interestingly, for their relationships to 'others', such as close relatives, friends (who have come to be considered family along the way), flatmates and locals.

What I have set out to do locates my research among recent publications discussing the intimate and personal dimensions of transnational migration and globalisation. Of these, at this point I highlight Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's *Distant Love* (2014), and Baldassar and Merla's (2013) study on transnational families and the circulation of care across borders. Indeed, my research will critically engage with these pieces (see chapter 2, section 2.4 for in depth theoretical discussion on the subject) as, along with them, I call for academic sensitivity and attention to the intimate realm of migration, and how migration in itself, has altered and re-shaped traditional understandings of intimate practices.

Though the issue of intimacy permeates the entirety of these pages, chapter 5 is specifically dedicated to unpacking this concept and connecting it with other relevant issues within the participants' accounts. In this way, the discussions on intimacy feature a great deal of attention to the relationships and social networks that these couples also perform with 'others' – family members, friends, housemates or simply other locals in the communities where they currently reside. Of course, inter-partner intimacy is thoroughly examined as well, but my approach to the participants' personal life was not limited to this only. The dialogues between partners, presented in the empirical chapters (chapters 4-6, particularly chapter 5),

indicate the importance that the interviewees themselves bestow on their close relationships to others. Far from 'adding' to their personal lives, often relationships with friends, parents, siblings, children, and even deceased grandparents, created the foundations of their personal values, sense of belonging and imaginative landscapes of how 'home' or romantic relationships should be executed.

1.4.3 Home-related (-bound?) issues: ideals of home and the transnational home

Finally, but by no means less importantly, this project looks at the concept of home. The empirical analysis in relation this matter will be discussed in chapter 6. Given this mobile, globalised context, along with the more accepting circumstances for non-heterosexuals, I ask: how is the idea of home understood and practiced today? And how do people moving from one location to another, and rather regularly, perform an idea of home that is mobile, yet that 'feels' grounding, as well? For the couples in this research, home was an inevitable and necessary topic of conversations; to a certain degree, I felt that their need to talk about it served as a metaphor for their life journeys/cycles – from their childhood homes and countries of birth, to the possibility of then embarking as adults to the pursuit and construction of the homes they so much idealised.

Naturally, when discussing the lives and experiences of transnational same-sex couples, it is relevant to enquire on the location of home within the transnational field; after all, transnational migration destabilises the way home is traditionally construed (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). The data and its subsequent analysis in chapter 6 will support this by arguing that the participants' notions and practices around home are permeated by constant interplays of the 'here' and the 'there', of

the interaction of home(s) and attachments that are both mobile and spatially located, and of home-making activities that are carried out across local and transnational spaces.

That said, the discussions on 'home' will also reveal the importance that transnational same-sex partners give to the materiality of home, that is, the home as an identifiable physical structure and location. This is important, because it further complicates our understanding of how 'mobile' people perform and construe home. After all, authors like Ahmed et al. (2003) have placed significant attention to the journeying process and nomadic experiences of home, whereas this research actually will explore the possibility of migration creating a profound need for rootedness and ownership of property (to call home) for those who experience it. The analysis of material culture narratives around the house will be of great importance in this chapter, in particular, as participants reflect on their daily activities, domestic undertakings, and the meanings behind them, through food, decorations and meaningful spaces.

1.5 Thesis outline

The following chapter ('Literature Review: minding the gaps') contains an in-depth presentation and discussion on the available academic literature on the main topics/ issues in this study; namely, transnational migration and queer mobility, intimacy, home, and the relevance of material culture for the analysis of home, identity and mobilities. Next, in chapter 3, titled 'An ethnographic approach for the study of transnational same-sex couples: reflections on knowledge making', I explain the methodological choices made for this study; this includes a presentation of my sampling strategy, a brief introduction to the research participants and discussions on epistemology and reflexivity. The rest of chapter 3 is devoted to a

thorough examination of the ethnographic approach adopted for data collection, and subsequently, the thematic procedure used for the analysis of this data. Key to this section is the exploration of how the narrative interviews, material culture narratives and participant-observation techniques were carried out, and how, together, produced rich and multifaceted data.

Chapters 4 to 6 will feature the presentation and critical analyses of the empirical data collected. Chapter 4 will focus on transnational migration; specifically, I will examine the participants' strategies in terms of dealing with the uncertainties of migration, as well as the mechanisms they followed in order to remain physically together as couples. Additionally, I will deal with the concept of 'transnational families', as I argue for the need to include non-heterosexual intimate units within this term, and therefore, to carry out further empirical work in this regard. Finally, I investigate issues of identity formation during migration, and matters related to local migrations and the urban/rural divide in connection to gay/lesbian subjectivities.

In chapter 5, my analysis centres around the theme of intimate life. Here, I research issues pertaining to inter-partner intimacy, but most interestingly, the participants' intimate life with 'others', namely, kin and non-kin. In this sense, I will discuss stories related to 'coming out', power-relations with kin, alienation, as well as the sustainment of friendships across time and distance.

Lastly, chapter 6 will be devoted to the understandings and performances of the concept of home. Precisely, my interest around home relies on how the research participants' defined home, but also, how they actually performed, or carried out this concept in practice. Hence, this chapter aims to illustrate the ideals, practices, and aspirations of home.

This thesis will end with the conclusions chapter (Chapter 7), where I offer a brief summary of the key findings and arguments of this study, followed by my

statements asserting the contributions and academic recommendations that this study intends to instigate.

2 Literature Review: minding the gaps

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the academic background behind this research. As I will argue here, the theoretical frameworks and debates are not limited to only one field of research; in fact, I draw from migration studies, the sociology of intimacies, material culture studies and the multidisciplinary study of home to nurture my understanding and arguments for the different questions and themes posed in this thesis.

This literature review will start by exploring the migration aspect of this study. I have titled this first section 'Transnational migration and queer mobile lives' as a way to integrate, intersect and reflect on how a variety of issues and concepts in transnationalism and migration studies operate in the lives and experiences of queer subjects. Suitably, I will discuss recent literature on 'queer migration', focusing primarily on how authors like Manalansan (2006) and Luibhéid (2004, 2008) have argued in favour of a study of migration and transnationalism that is inclusive of the experiences of people who live outside (or not only in terms) of heterosexuality. Additionally, I will consider scholarship that goes beyond the traditional economic (labour) and political (activism, asylum seeking) contours of migration studies in order to examine the intimate, relational and emotional dimensions embedded in the migratory and transnational experience. In this sense, I will explore the importance of considering emotions as an important and inescapable dimension for understanding migrant lives, identities and day-to-day relations. Furthermore, I will consider literature discussing transnational families, the relationship between mobility and identity building, and translocality.

Subsequently, I will turn to the matter of intimacy, and most specifically, to the subject of same sex intimacies. First, I will examine the potential socio-cultural factors that may have impacted on the growing academic interest in the intimate

life since the 1980s. Secondly, I will give an overview on the existent studies available on same-sex intimacies (Weeks et al., 2001 and Gabb, 2001, among others), while also pointing out the gap in this literature regarding transnational same-sex relationships. Finally, the work of authors such as Finch (2007), Almack (2008) and Dermott and Seymour (2011) will be useful to discuss the relevance of matters related to 'displaying', status, and 'doing' family for this study.

A third section will focus on the academic explorations of 'home'. In recent years, a proliferation of literature on this matter has flourished across different disciplines like sociology, history and geography. I will critically review some of these key writings in order to provide a strong theoretical framework for later analysing the different ideas and practices of home. The connection between different conceptions of home (as a place, space, feeling, journey, or cultural and social narrative) and transnationalism is central to this study.

The final segment of this literature review will be devoted to material culture and its relationship with the social world. In this section, I want to illustrate how a materialist approach to social research can be useful for the study of same-sex intimacies, the exploration of meanings and doings of home, domestic geographies, and transnationalism and mobility.

2.2 Transnational migration and queer mobile lives

'[Not] just (any) body can be a citizen any more, for some bodies have been marked by the state as non-procreative, in pursuit of sex only for pleasure, a sex that is non-productive of babies and no economic gain. Having refused the heterosexual imperative of citizenship, these bodies, according

to the state, pose a profound threat to the survival of the nation... As the state moves to reconfigure the nation, it simultaneously resuscitates the nation as heterosexual.'

Alexander (1994: 175)

Despite referring to citizenship, and in particular to the nation-state and its relationship to the people and society (the governed), Alexander (1994) illustrates in these words a common denominator, prevalent not only in matters related to citizenship, but in perhaps all fields of social, political and economic life: the construction of the queer subject as the alien - the anticitizen (Canaday, 2009), the stranger (Phelan, 2001), or the 'deviant outsider' (Richardson, 2000: 266). In constructing boundaries in the law, in policy (Canaday, 2009: 9) and in scholarship (Luibhéid, 2004: 227), lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people have been left out and generally ignored in the analysis of migration; the figure of 'the migrant' has long been constructed along heterosexual lines (Luibhéid, 2008: 169), thus impeding any possibility of exploring the lives of those with non-normative gender behaviours or sexual orientations.

However, recent publications have aimed to alter this picture, arguing for a more inclusive and comprehensive reassessment of global migration (Manalansan, 2006; Luibhéid, 2004 and 2008). At the same time, other authors like Mai and King (2009: 296) have insisted on the need of going beyond the traditional economic and political spheres in which we place the migrant (as the mobile worker, the asylum seeker or the refugee, for example), and to start evaluating other powerful and important categories like love, sexuality and emotional attachment, as key push-pull factors that explain different practices of migration, mobility and settlement.

In the subsections that follow, I aim to investigate the presence(s) and absence(s) of the queer subject in migration and transnational studies. To achieve this, I will first provide a short discussion on transnationalism, to then move on to more complex discussions on translocality, and the intersections between transnational migration, queerness and identity-building. Specifically, the analysis will revolve around the experiences and negotiations (in terms of sexual and cultural identities) that queers engage in while navigating through different transnational fields, the impact of mobility on the self and one's identities, and the encounters with 'others' along the way. Finally, I will close this section by pointing out the absence of queer persons in notions such as 'transnational families'; identifying and critiquing this gap in the literature on intimate life and transnational migration certainly adds to the knowledge contributions of this research project.

2.2.1 A short introduction to transnationalism

The kind of relationships that I am interested in studying, are transnational in many ways. Before transnationalism was widely discussed in social research, anthropologists like Appadurai (1991) were already recognising the shifts and flows produced by migration, globalisation and cultural production across cultures and continents. Specifically, Appadurai (1991: 191) stated that the need to reconceptualise the nature of lived experience and identities, as 'groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous.' This scholarship eventually led to conversations over migration, 'the crisis of the nation-state' (Basch et al., 1994) and the transnational flows of people, money, services and culture (Smith, 2001). The debates over a proper definition of transnationalism are recurrent (Jayaweera, 2012; Portes et al., 1999; Smith and Guarnizo et al., 1998; and Glick Schiller et al., 1995). Broadly

speaking, transnationalism is 'widely understood as referring to multiple activities – economic, cultural, personal – that require sustained contacts and travels across national borders' (Ahmed et al., 2003: 3). As Ahmed et al. (2003) also argue, research on transnationalism is important as it problematizes conventional understandings of homes and migrants. Likewise, Levitt (2001) and Tomlinson (1999) highlighted the fluidity and diversity implicit in transnationalism, as the relationships between belonging, location and the 'here' and 'there' are anchored in multi-local ties and extensive mobility – corporeal, imaginative and even virtual travel.

Indeed, the transnational perspective on migration will be useful to explain a lot of what the subjects of this research go through as they move from one place to another: an endless effort to stay connected to different things, people and places, to retain memories, and a continuous drive to make sense of 'home'. As demonstrated by recent scholarship (Benedicto, 2008; Cant, 1997; Cantú, 2009; Fortier, 2001 and 2003; and Manalansan, 2004), a great deal is negotiated during migratory processes: identity, love, ontological security, sexuality, emotions, belongings, and ideas of home are constantly built and rebuilt, re-evaluated and re-invented.

2.2.2 Mapping mobile/migrant emotions

2.2.2.1 *The 'emotional turn' in migration*

Emotions are integral to human life and 'to the processes of meaning production' (Hall, 1997: 2). This holds true also for migrants as they experience mixed and contradictory feelings such as love, guilt, grief, loss, ambition, anger, nostalgia, and hope along their journeys. Indeed, their emotional landscapes are constantly challenged, constructed, and re-constructed in everyday interactions with kin, friends, and 'strangers' (Ahmed, 2000) locally, across borders, homelands and

ethnic/cultural groups. Despite the relevance of the emotional realm in migration, the topic remains understudied; '[this] is partly to be explained by the dominance of economic and political analyses of migration, which tend to downplay emotional factors or overlook them altogether' (Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015: 73).

Given this thesis' interest in transnational migration, it is appropriate to examine the key implications of pondering the emotional realm for the study of migration processes. As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) argue, the emotional lives of migrants today are carried out across different national and transnational 'fields', and with communication technologies and social media at their disposal, emotions and intimate life are performed and displayed in complex and simultaneous ways across time and space, and not only in close proximity (Baldassar et al., 2016). Thus, 'the notion of "the migrant condition" is a reference to the characteristic ambiguities and tensions around emotional connections to "here" and "there"' (Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015: 74). For this reason, Svašek (2012a: 3) holds that 'if we want to unravel and understand the social complexities of human mobility and belonging, it is necessary to include a focus on emotional dynamics'.

Moreover, as it will become clearer later in this thesis, the experience of transnational same sex couples is tightly linked to relationships and connections with kin "here" and "there"; in other words, to the performance of transnational family life. Hence, as the empirical chapters will show, emotions are a 'constitutive part of the transnational family experience itself' (Skrbiš, 2008: 236). In fact, the existence of emotional ties with kin and friends (who may also be regarded as family) cannot be ignored in any attempt to understand transnational families and the migratory experience, overall (Skrbiš, 2008).

Nevertheless, throughout the social sciences, there has been a tendency to overlook the role of emotions (Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015; Mai and King, 2009; Skrbiš, 2008). In regard to migration studies, I agree with Mai and King (2009)

who indicated how research paradigms consistently and implicitly side-lined the role of affect and feelings, 'as if migrants are not allowed to love, express their sexualities, have emotions, be intimate'. For this reason, considering an analysis of emotions 'provides an important corrective and critique of predominant "economic rationalist" approaches to migration of the past... [E]motions themselves are on the move. They evolve and are negotiated across novel settings, life circumstances and points of reference.' (Bocagni and Baldassar, 2015: 74).

2.2.2.2 Defining emotions

As I continue delving into this critical literature review of migration and emotions, it becomes necessary to note that theoretical definitions of emotions differ and are actively debated across the social sciences (Svašek and Skrbiš, 2007; Bocagni and Baldassar, 2015). As Svašek (2005) and Svašek and Skrbiš (2007) have indicated, for many years, Western thinking (heavily influenced by philosophers such as Plato) has been dominated by the idea that emotions exist solely within the minds and bodies of individuals. On further reflection, the history and theorising of emotion seems to be buttressed by a 'debate about relations between emotion, bodily sensation, and cognition', therefore dividing theories 'in terms of whether emotions are tied primarily to body sensations or to cognition' (Ahmed, 2004: 5). One useful way of stepping out of this dilemma occurs by borrowing Ahmed's (2004) approach on emotions: first, by construing them as not solely properties of/in the individual, and secondly, by not thinking about emotions as 'things' that people 'have', but rather, to focus on them in terms of what they 'do' (Ahmed, 2004: 4). Following Ahmed (2004), when looking at transnational migration, my research aims to find out not what emotions *are*, but 'how they function as social practices in continually changing circumstances – that is what emotions do' (Harding and Pribram, 2009: 4). Consequently, this approach broadens the

horizons of knowledge production, as I assess the ever-changing cultural bases, references, imaginaries, attachments, and geographies that have defined the migratory journeys of the transnational same-sex couples in this study.

I agree with Harding and Pribram (2009) when they argue that, though emotions are indeed experienced at an individual level, it is important to also study them as they operate, concurrently, in larger cultural settings and processes. Certainly, emotions often occur in social spaces (Jackson, 1989; in Svašek and Skrbiš, 2007), and notably, bodily interpretations of emotions, discourses around feelings, and display rules are often 'influenced by family histories, ethnic and gender identifications, and other factors' (Svašek and Skrbiš, 2007: 371). In the case of this thesis, the 'emotional' setting is transnational migration, hence, the home(s), and the connections and attachments 'here' and there'. Given the complexity of the 'transnational sphere', my analysis will pay close attention to the progression of 'moving from one place to (at least) an-other', which consequently involves 'change and transformation and the consequent (re)negotiation of self and others' (Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015: 75). As Svašek (2012a: 4) asserts, the 'others' in emotional encounters 'are not only other human beings, but might also include animals, landscapes, material objects, images or events that affect people emotionally'. This assertion ties well with the aims of this thesis, as I study how participants interact with transnational migration, people, material objects, past events, memories, identity, expectation, and hope. Suitably, in section 2.5.1 of this chapter, I will examine the relationship between materiality/ objects and emotions during migration.

When it comes to theorising emotions, Svašek (2012a) provided a useful and comprehensive way of thinking about them, and I would not like to close this section without discussing her ideas. Initially, Svašek (2012a: 3) defined emotions as 'dynamic processes through which individuals experience and interpret the changing world, position themselves vis-à-vis others, and shape their

subjectivities'. Her perspective is helpful because it regards the self as a 'mobile, multiple, relational being-in-the-world that is captured by his or her surroundings, engaging with past, present and future situations' (Svašek, 2012a: 3). Furthermore, Svašek (2012a) also indicates how using the notion of 'affect', as employed by Giles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Baruch Spinoza enable explorations that consider 'how bodies, things and other phenomena, conceptualized as field of intensity and impact, work one another' (Svašek, 2012a: 3). In effect, affect is closely related to 'the bodily', and it is understood as 'embodied dispositions and experiences that influence what people think, feel, and do' (Zemblayas, 2007; in Rinquist and Fataar, 2016: 523). Watkins (2011; in Rinquist and Fataar, 2016: 523) distinguished emotions from affect by arguing that 'affect is something accumulated in the body and that emotions are the "mindful acknowledgement" of our affective dispositions'; affect, then, is a sort-of bodily unconscious, 'precognitive, prepersonal state of being' (Rinquist and Fataar, 2016: 523). The concept of 'affect' will be instrumental in the analysis of home-making practices, to be examined in section 6.3.

More importantly, however, Svašek (2002, 2005, 2012a, 2012b) expands her understanding of emotions by defining them as discourses, practices, and embodied experiences:

The perspective of 'discourse' outlines how cultural categories of emotions, and the notion of emotivity itself, produce knowledge about the world and the self that is often historically and group specific. The viewpoint of 'practice' draws attention to the performative nature of emotions, in terms of both unconscious, learned behaviour and the more deliberate politics of emotion. The outlook of 'embodied experience' explores physical aspects of emotional experience,

in particular the perceptual process of bodily sensation and interpretation, and the interaction of bodies in space...

(Svašek, 2012a: 5)

Svašek's (2012a) categorisation on emotions provides new and productive tools to approach the empirical data of this thesis. The discursive perspective, which alludes to Lutz and Abu-Lughod's (1990; in Svašek, 2012b: 9) work as a starting point, argues that 'discourses of emotions and emotivity produce knowledge and society that may create, maintain or challenge power relations and thus influence subjectivity'. This will be useful to explore the participants' relationship with their homeland, encounters with locals in the host country, and culture of origin. Equally, it will be significant in the examination of power relationships and feelings of guilt in their relationships with their parents.

Svašek's (2012a) point on emotions as 'practices' is heavily influenced by Hochschild's (1983) study, which linked emotional performances and experiences to the labour process. A perspective that is attentive to the theatrical or performative elements of 'the emotional' will be useful when assessing the different aspects of display during the interview settings and material culture narratives. This will be closely linked to Finch's (2007) concept of displaying families, later explained in section 2.3.3 of this chapter.

Finally, seeing emotions as 'embodied experiences' enables the conversations in this research to explore the multi-sensorial properties of transnational migration, the physical home, coupled life, and even of my own experience on the field as a researcher. Here, the concept of affect becomes central for describing one's (bodily/sensory/emotional) engagements with human and non-human worlds. In this sense, Deleuze (Deleuze (1998; in Svašek, 2012b: 11) defined the concept of affect as 'as an interactional embodied process that appears as a result of relational encounters between people in changing life worlds'. This will also be useful for

studying the participants' associations with spaces and materiality, hence not only how this 'stuff' embodies their relationships to other human beings, but also how the 'stuff' shapes the couples' daily lives.

2.2.2.3 *Emotions and same-sex migrant couples: a study*

Though I will broadly explore the intersections and absences of the queer/non-heterosexual subject in migration studies later in this chapter (section 2.2.5), I have chosen to discuss a particular piece in this subsection as it explicitly relates to emotions and migrant same-sex couples. The research carried out by Gorman-Murray (2009) in Australia, looked at the 'embodied and emotional dimensions' of queer migration. Thus, not only does it illustrate Svašek's (2012a) theoretical perspective on emotions, but it also provides relevant and important empirical knowledge for my own research.

In summary, Gorman-Murray (2009) mapped the link of desires, emotions and intimate attachments in migration. His study ultimately called for the need to pay further attention to the 'emotional geographies of sexualities' and to the different migrations experienced by queers throughout their lives in the quest for self-discovery, intimacy and belonging: the migration of 'coming out' as the pursuit for self-reinvention and exploration of the non-heterosexual world; the 'gravitational group migration' as the search for a assuring and non-heterosexual friendly neighbourhood/ community; and finally, the 'relationship migration', where the consolidation of a same-sex relationship, or its breakup, act as catalysts for mobility.

Much of Gorman-Murray's work (2009) is evocative of the works of Cant (1997) and Cantú (2001, 2009), as it exemplifies how scholars in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and human geographies have been increasingly interested

in using qualitative and narrative approaches to understand the complexities of today's migration. Equally, it illustrates how the 'emotional turn' argued by authors such as Boccagni and Baldassar (2015), Mai and King (2009), Skrbiš (2008) would look like in empirical research. By integrating intimacy and emotions into migration research, perhaps researchers will be able to see and understand migration from a different perspective – one that is more sensitive to migrants' everyday lives, and to their emotional connections and attachments. I will return to Gorman-Murray's work in subsection 0 of this literature review, as I examine his empirical studies on sexuality and domesticity.

2.2.3 On translocality, place and 'strange encounters'

In her book *Strange Encounters*, Ahmed (2000) studied the 'encounters' between locals and 'aliens'/'strangers', and the challenges multicultural societies face as they try to embrace the idea of 'living with difference' while also sustaining a 'national imaginary' (Ahmed, 2000: 95). This serves as a good starting point to think about the ways in which migration affects people – their perceptions, identities and the ways in which the politics of inclusion/exclusion operate. Though that first 'entry' into a new setting is the first challenging experience, I believe that it is important to pay attention to 'other' processes and 'local' migrations that also occur. In fact, authors like Bricknell and Data (2011) declare that not only until recently have migration scholars (outside of human geographies) been paying close attention to study the significance of local mobilities, encounters, and practices, after the international migration has occurred.

'Translocality' is the key word for describing some of these processes; though mobility is still central here, this concept 'deliberately confuses the boundaries of the local in an effort to capture the increasingly complicated nature of spatial processes and identities, yet it insists on viewing such processes and identities as

place-based rather than exclusively mobile, uprooted or “travelling” (Oakes and Schein, 2006: 20). Among studies that apply ‘translocality’ in their assessment of connections, spaces and places, the one by Bonnerjee et al. (2012) is particularly telling on how different diasporic communities interact, and build networks, histories as well as a sense of home and belonging at a local level. In section 4.4, in chapter 4, I will examine a few of the most representative participant accounts describing what happens after their initial migration: the attempts to accommodate themselves within the new society, the moves and mobilities from one locality to another, the hostilities and difficult encounters with locals, among other issues.

The idea of ‘postnational identities’ (Appadurai, 1996) is at the core of these experiences, as immigrants re-assess, adapt and integrate themselves in the new country. This provides a ‘new sense of locality’ (Smith, 2011: 182) and a sort of proximity to ‘the linguistic imaginary of the nation state’ (Appadurai, 1996: 166). Indeed, such processes emerge as a consequence of the complex interaction between place, identity and everyday life (Perkins and Thorns, 2012), but also in terms of the ‘geographies of encounter’ (Valentine, 2008) and modes of relating (Barnett, 2005). Ultimately, Brickell and Datta (2011) suggest that every physical environment forces us to re-think and re-evaluate the ways in which we relate to ‘others’: ‘it implies new kinds of behaviours in these places, new modes of movements, and new kinds of corporeal experiences’ (Brickell and Datta, 2011: 6).

In this sense, section 4.4, in chapter 4, will also examine how global cities like London provide new opportunities for identity-building, relating and networking - the city ‘re-imagined as a site of connection’, as Valentine (2008: 324) declared. However, the city was not the only place where the research participants lived. Of the 12 couples in this study, 2 resided in a rural area and 1 lived in a semi-rural one. It is important to mention this mostly because sexual identities like ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’ or ‘queer’ have often had a connotation associated with urban spaces (Baker, 2012; Gray, 2009; Halberstam, 2003) hence ignoring the experiences of

non-heterosexuals living and migrating to/from the countryside (Gray, 2009; Gray et al., 2016). Similarly, authors like Baker (2011: 38) assert that 'often represented as homophobic, rural space is valued insofar as it is left behind' and 'absent from hegemonic conceptualizations of queer visibility'. The point as Gray et al. (2016: 6-7) argue is that 'the spatial politics of... sexuality are enormously complicated'; familiar spatial categorisations have ceased to fully explain the experiences of same-sex people in the contemporary West (Gray et al., 2016), thus the need to visibilise those 'rural non-heterosexual stories'. Moreover, the literature cited in this paragraph also reminded me that such complexity in sexual geographies also had a lot to say in terms of individual choice and circumstance.

2.2.4 Transformation: on transnationalism and identity

The previous two subsections examined the role of emotions, mobility and places as fundamental elements that shape and affect one's identity-building process. Therefore, I briefly discuss here matters of identity and transnational migration, particularly paying attention to the 'various ways transnational settings and dynamics affect the construction, negotiation and reproduction of identities' (Vertovec, 2001: 573). Cantú (2009), for example, illustrated the various allegiances and complex concessions that queer Mexican male migrants had to go through in order to participate in different social, cultural and economic scenarios – i.e. their families of origin, their queer friends, other Mexican migrants in the U.S.A., etc.

Ultimately, Vertovec (2001: 573) argues that '[t]ransnationalism and identity are concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition'. On the one hand, migration and transnational logics (networks, activism, communication) are often grounded on the assumption that there is a shared common cultural, social and political identity. On the other hand, however, 'the identities of specific individuals and groups of

people are negotiated within social worlds that span more than one place' (Vertovec, 2001: 573). Since the mid-1990s, this last approach started to resonate more with migration scholars, as initially 'disagreements about the frames for understanding (im)migrant experience were largely contained within dominant models of bipolar landscapes and localized identities, [but] they now focus much more widely on the relationship between those models and the alternative images of transnational social spaces and multi-local affiliations' (Rouse, 1995: 355).

This assertion is supported by other work – theoretical and empirical – published during the last few years. In this sense, Elliott and Urry (2010: 3) argue that 'the rise of an intensively mobile society reshapes the self – its everyday activities, interpersonal relations with others, as well as connections with the wider world'. They call this 'portable personhood', as a way to bring attention to how transnational movements and 'the globalization of mobility extends into the core of the self' (Elliott and Urry, 2010: 3). Empirical studies by Çağlar (2001), Golbert (2001) and Wiles (2008) also contribute to the conversation on identity and transnational migration, highlighting the ways in which various practices, discourses and attitudes influence people's identities (locally and globally) greatly. Çağlar (2001: 610), for instance, argued that transnational migrants 'weave their collective identities out of simple affiliations and positionings and link their cross-cutting belongings with complex attachments and multiple allegiances to issues, peoples, places, and traditions beyond the boundaries of their resident nation-state'. On her part, while studying the transnational and diasporic orientations of young Ukrainian Jews, Golbert (2001) directed our attention to the possibilities and affectations brought about by mobility and transnational experience; indeed, these young group of people assess 'everyday experiences, the past, and the future, with a double consciousness garnered from transnational links and a transnational conception of self' (Golbert, 2001: 717). Finally, Wiles' (2008) study on the experiences and conceptions of home of New Zealanders in London highlighted,

what she called, the 'unanticipated costs in transnationalism': '[w]hat turns out to be disconcerting for those who return is that they cannot in fact return to that "home" because as their sense of self and as a group changes so too do their relationships to home and their process of meaning making... [T]he return home and attempts to resettle ultimately lead to some of the most difficult changes in their sense of identity' (Wiles, 2008: 134).

This literature serves as a departure point to later evaluate in the data chapters the ways in which the transnational same-sex couples in this research embody transnationalism and mobility – indeed, how mobilities, attachments to people and places, as well as different social and cultural encounters have affected their journeys and their sense of self and identities. Such discussions will largely be featured in chapter 4, section 4.6. Appropriately, I will now move in the next section, to discuss the interaction and intersections of non-heterosexual identity and transnational migration.

2.2.5 Finding the non-heterosexual subject in migration studies

Before directly addressing queerness and transnational migration, it is necessary to introduce the reader to an introductory overview of how scholars in migration and sexuality studies first argued for a 'sexual turn' in their fields of research, and how different areas and structures in the migrant experience were therefore being reassessed and challenged. After that, I will review the literature particularly focused on transnational migration and queerness, and then use that to critique the concept of transnational families, as its theorists seemed to have ignored queer migrants and their familial experiences altogether.

2.2.5.1 The sexual turn in migration studies

Authors like Manalansan (2006) have called for the acknowledgement and incorporation of non-heterosexuals in migration studies. His main argument holds that such integration will effectively improve intersectional analyses of how systems of oppression interact to shape and regulate people's lives, while also providing additional instruments to reassess and complicate normative notions of gender and sexuality (Manalansan, 2006: 226). Though Manalansan (2006) recognises that sexuality is not exactly a new factor of study, he attempts to provoke more conversations on the hegemonic premises embedded in migration narratives.

Similarly, Luibhéid (2004) noted that 'sexuality... generally also structures every aspect of immigrant experiences, in spite of the fact that immigration scholarship virtually ignores the connections among heteronormativity, sexuality, and immigration' (Luibhéid, 2004: 227). Furthermore, Luibhéid (2004), along with other scholars such as Hondagneu-Sotelo (2000) and Rubin (1984), argued that even after years of feminist research, gender is still seen within a framework of traditional sex roles. Consequently, sexuality remains as an unproblematised and 'private' matter for many immigration scholars (Luibhéid, 2004: 227).

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedwick (1990: 30) stated that 'the question of gender and the question of sexuality, inextricable from one another though they are in that each can be expressed only in terms of the other, are nonetheless not the same question'. While feminists like Braidotti (2011) have provided queer theorists with important analytical tools on how to deal with bodies, identities and belongings in a fast moving, and globalized world, a gender perspective cannot fully grasp the complexity of sexuality and of the life of queers in migration. A thorough examination on how sexuality works as a dimension of power, shaping and organising processes of migration and incorporation (Cantú, 2001) is only possible by means of a 'sexual turn' in migration studies (Mai and King, 2009).

As a result of this 'sexual turn', it will be possible to discuss the opportunities and constraints presented by globalisation, recognising discussions regarding sexuality and gender, and the greater visibility of gay identities, while also highlighting the reinforcement of categories, sexual boundaries, and ideas of 'normality' (Cooper, 2013: 141-142; Lee, 2011: 146). Hence, the usefulness and potential of a sexual perspective in migration research will lie in its ability to critique, and 'to create a space in opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformational work can begin' (Cohen, 1997: 438).

Most scholars who do engage with non-heterosexuality in migration studies have explored areas related to immigration controls at the border (See Luibhéid, 2002, 2008b), citizenship (See Bell and Binnie, 2000), asylum seeking (See Berg and Millbank, 2009), and/or sexual work (See Mai, 2009; Vogel, 2009). However, and for the purposes of this study, I will turn to the work of Fortier (2001; 2003), Cantú Jr. (2001, 2009), Manalansan (2004), Benedicto (2008), and Cant (1997) with the aim of investigating the role of sexuality and mobility in identity interrogation and formation of intimate circles/networks. This focus will enquire how different matters related to home, identity, and belonging, can help scholars to understand the complexities of migration and immigration for non-heterosexuals.

2.2.5.2 Queerness in transnational migration and diaspora studies

Central to the study of migration and queerness is the scholarly work on queer diaspora. This work will be particularly illuminating for my research as it delves into the different negotiations (contradictions, even) that queer migrants face, particularly in relation to their identities and their relationship with the past and the future. Moreover, the issue of home, which is also central to this project, is explored in queer diaspora studies, and is also embedded in such discussions

between identity and present and future. In regards to non-heterosexuals and migration, Cant (1997) argues that 'while migration can bring opportunities for people to develop their lesbian and gay identities, it can also bring opportunities to reassess their childhoods' (Cant, 1997: 6). Certainly, after leaving the childhood home and away from familial pressures and expectations, time allows for individuals to develop a new sense of themselves, and a new ability to reassess their past and life stories in a new light (Cant, 1997).

Cant's (1997) argument is linked to the work of Fortier (2001, 2003), who aimed to map 'the intersections of queer memory and transnational spaces as they are uttered in terms of 'home' (Fortier, 2001: 405). Most interestingly, her work also examines how 'home' and specifically, the 'childhood home' are represented in queer migration narratives (Fortier, 2003). Indeed, Fortier's (2001, 2003) work problematises 'coming-out' stories that portray the childhood home as oppressive one, and the journey toward a queer cosmopolitan community as an idealised and liberating end (Fortier, 2003). Remembrances of the home are never merely left behind, and furthermore, cannot be circumscribed to an absolute definitional status; home is ever-present - in the past, in the future, but also in the *in-betweenness*:

It is a space of belonging that proceeds from remembrances of beginnings that attach 'home' to places, faces and bodies, and emotions (feeling at home in a network of dispersed friends; feeling the loneliness and fear of the immigrant)... (Home) is not simply a sense of place, but that it is also a material space, a lived space, inhabited by people who work to keep the roof over their heads, or to keep their family warm, safe and sane. In that sense, homing desires do not occur in the movement towards an endlessly deferred space,

*but they also emerge within the very spaces of inhabitation
called home.*

(Fortier, 2001: 420).

Likewise, the ethnographic research carried out by Cantú (2001, 2009) in the United States with non-heterosexual Mexican immigrant men illustrates the contradictions and difficult negotiations implied with 'leaving home' and pursuing a 'new' one – a new sense of belonging, a new identity, and a new family that can validate one's non-heterosexuality. In this sense, while Cantú's (2001, 2009) research initially indicated that the transnational and migratory experience of these men was mostly explained through their wish to achieve sexual liberation and independence, his ethnographic work revealed that most of them were inclined to remain in contact with the family of origin and pursue transnational connections, economically and socially speaking. This then led Cantú (2009) to explore how non-heterosexual Mexican men strived to get support and acceptance of their non-heterosexuality from their family through remittances, as the money that they sent to their parents or siblings was usually 'paid back' in the form of approval and validation of their 'queer' identities and lifestyles.

On the other hand, Cantú's work (2001, 2009) is also valuable in other ways. First, it portrays the ways in which new (transnational) social fields based on nationality/ethnicity (Mexican, Latino) and non-heterosexual affiliation (gay, bisexual, men who have sex with men [MSM]) enable and support the migration process. In fact, these new kinship networks and (later to be) 'chosen' families (Weston, 1991; Weeks et al., 2001) come to form the foundation for emotional support available for non-heterosexual Mexican immigrants in the United States (Cantú, 2009). Furthermore, in terms of expectations, these new friends, and 'chosen' families not only help queer immigrants to cope with the difficulties of maintaining links and relationships with Mexico (in terms of places and people), but also to deal with the day to day problems associated with isolation and

discrimination suffered by non-heterosexual Latinos in the United States, largely due to their sexual preferences, but also to language barriers, class differences, and their skin colour (Cantú, 2009).

In many ways, Cantú's study (2009) is comparable to Manalansan's (2004) and Benedicto's (2008) as they discuss the pressures of dominant and often illusory narratives of an 'imagined gay globality' (Benedict, 2008) on Filipino queer immigrants. Accordingly, Benedicto (2008) illustrates the tensions of migration when studying the paradoxes of the term *bakla*, a Filipino word that broadly refers to gays, camp cross-dressers, flamboyant effeminate men and transgendered males. While queers in Filipino society use the word in association with lower-class queers, Filipino gay men in New York City embrace the word as a space for belonging and empowerment in the midst of the racism they are subject to in the mainstream American gay (and non-gay) society. Thus, Benedicto (2008) shows the sometimes contradictory and differential ways in which *queerness* is constructed in the diaspora and in the home country, at least in part, as a consequence of mobility. As Manalansan (2004) argues, migration is not merely a movement from oppression to liberation, but a constant struggle where experiences are constantly restructured and new inequalities and opportunities emerge.

In the following (and last) subsection exploring the scope of queer migration for this project, I will concentrate on the intersection of transnational families and queerness. Intimate life, together with migration and sexuality, is at the centrepiece of this research, and it is why I will argue that the absence of the queer subject in academic discussions on family and migration is problematic, as it ignores the intimate lives, commitments and experiences of non-heterosexual transnational migrants, like the ones participating in this research.

2.2.5.3 Transnational families and the absence of the queer subject

As discussed in section 2.2.5.1 of this chapter, authors like Manalansan (2006), Luibhéid (2004) and Rubin (1984) have called for a 'sexual turn' in migration studies. Such developing scholarship has examined the role of sexuality in different areas like immigration controls at the border (See Luibhéid, 2002, 2008b), citizenship (See Bell and Binnie, 2000), asylum seeking (See Berg and Millbank, 2009), identity formation (See Cantú, 2009; Cant, 1997), or sexual work (See Mai, 2015; Vogel, 2009). Similarly, as it will be discussed in section 2 of this literature review, sociological work on family and intimacy has slowly embraced same-sex intimacies and experiences in that area of study (Jamieson, 2011; Smart, 2007; Weeks, 2007; Weeks et al., 2001) However, I will argue in this part of the chapter that there is a fundamental gap in current research on transnationalism and intimate life; my argument holds that sociology and migration scholars have yet to question or even fully recognise the absence of same-sex couples and families in the conceptualisation of pivotal terms like 'transnational family'. In spite of the existence of a number of studies explicitly discussing 'transnational families' in relation to issues like gender, globalisation, race and post-coloniality (Baldassar and Merla, 2013; Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Goulbourne et al., 2010; Skrbiš, 2008; Salih, 2003; Zontini, 2009), matters associated with non-heterosexuality have been notorious for their absence.

On the one hand, gays, lesbians and bisexuals seem to have gained academic visibility as individual or coupled migrants (as even this research would initially suggest) in recent years. There are papers on 'mixed transnational couples' which include the experience of gay and lesbian couples (King-O'Riain, 2016), and on-going research projects exploring the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual migrants from Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union in Scotland (University of Glasgow, 2015). Nevertheless, these studies are still unable to

understand and frame their experiences within and in connection to larger family structures – relations, concerns, emotions, care-giving practices – which have been, overall, poorly discussed.

In section 2.2.5.2 of this chapter I introduced the ethnographic research carried out by Cantú (2009) on gay and bisexual Mexican migrants in the United States. His work did address some of the participants' family connections and practices, indicating that although the migratory experience of these men was mostly explained through their wish to achieve sexual liberation and independence, most of them were inclined to remain in contact with the family of origin. Some of them, according to the data in the study (Cantú, 2009) attempted to get support and acceptance from their family through remittances, as the money that they send to their parents or siblings is usually "paid back" in the form of approval and validation. Cantú's (2009) work and the literature in this section link well with the data presented later in chapters 4 and 5, as I discuss transnational families, in particular, but also, as I further explore the idea that in order to fully understand familial relationships and dynamics, in general, one has to comprehend that 'most relationships are longstanding', difficult, and not easy to abandon (Goulbourne et al., 2010: 136).

On the other hand, the topic of transnational families has been an important matter of discussion in migration studies over the years. Definitions of what a 'transnational family' may be vary, but a few elements cut across the existing explanations. In this sense, Bryceson and Vuorela (2002: 3) define them as 'families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'familyhood', even across borders. Similarly, in their own description, Baldassar et al. (2007: 13) stress the unity, 'sense of collectivity and kinship' of these families, 'in spite of being spread across multiple nations'. This insistence on care-giving and sense of 'co-presence' (Svašek, 2008; Urry, 2003)

has inspired more recent research on how these families sustain their relationships across time and space, in spite of the material and emotional hardships along the way. Among these, Baldassar and Merla's (2012) study on transnational families and the circulation of care, discusses the reciprocal, yet uneven exchange of caregiving. Most importantly, it also emphasises the intergenerational networks and power relationships at play in these transnational dynamics. Other works worth mentioning in relation to transnational families are: Goulbournet et al.'s (2010), which explored the complex interaction between ethnicity, identity, transnational family networks and social capital; Ryan (2008), Salih's (2003) and Zontini's (2009), as they provided important empirical data looking at the role of women and their experience within transnationalism and family dynamics; also, Wilding's (2006) and Baldassar's (2008), both of which analysed the construction of co-presence in transnational families, chiefly through the use of the internet and ICT's (virtual intimacies); and finally, Skrbiš' (2008) and Svašek's (2008), who argued in favour of valuing emotional processes and embodied experiences in the studies of transnational family life.

Therefore, the data in section 4.5, chapter 4, will aim to find connections and intersections between the experience and practices of transnational same-sex couples with those of transnational families. Hence, it will demonstrate that the transnational same-sex couples in this study engage in a number of embodied and emotional experiences that would involve them in what authors like Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) have defined and constituted as 'transnational family'. Even as they migrate and move away from familial pressures and expectations, authors like Cant (1997: 6) assert that 'queers' do not simply migrate and 'move on' with their lives in a 'coherently' linear manner; instead, they continuously reassess their lives and negotiate family relations across space, time and distance. This goes in parallel with more recent feminist and migration scholarship criticising the individualisation thesis (Smart and Shipman, 2004), as it suggests that 'most relationships are

longstanding and not easily cancellable... Most individuals are involved in ties and responsibilities that require ongoing negotiations rather than in loose relationships that can be left when they become difficult' (Goulbourne et al., 2010: 136). The participants in this research engage in a variety of experiences, activities and emotional reflections typical of the transnational phenomena, as described by Goulbourne et al. (2010), Vertovec (2009) and Skrbiš (2008).

This section (2.2), started by reviewing the work of authors that argued for the inclusion of the queer subject within the scope of transnational migration studies. The topic of transnational families demonstrates that, indeed, the task is far from finished. But as I pass now to examine literature in the field of intimacy, it will be possible to see the difficulties that queers have also experienced in order to be finally recognised within cultural, social, political and academic understandings of 'the family'.

2.3 On Intimacy

2.3.1 Intimacy, same-sex intimacies and beyond

Since the late 1980s scholars across different disciplines have been inquiring, debating and writing about intimacy. Transformations in expectations surrounding love and gender (Cancian, 1987), the influence of capitalism and consumption culture in our emotional lives (Illouz, 2007), and the greater visibility and acceptance of same-sex relationships (Weeks et al., 2001), are some of the reasons behind a growing attention to this subject.

Regarding sociological research, Seidman (2013: 318-19) argues that the turn to the study of microsocial dynamics (identity construction, stigma, representation, etc.) in the 1950s and 1960s paved the way for scholarship on love, emotions,

sexuality, and intimacies to emerge during the following decades. Indeed, sociologists like Giddens (1992), Jamieson (1998, 2011) and Morgan (1996) assessed how profound changes in the West were impacting intimate life at the turn of the century: feminism, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) activism, the spread of contraceptive methods, the widespread of internet use, globalisation, neoliberalism, the feminisation of labour, and the wide range of options and arrangements beyond marriage (including same-sex marriage) were some of the processes affecting and challenging taken-for-granted meanings of intimacy and family (Seidman, 2013). Rubin (1984), Jamieson (1998) and Wilkinson (2013), hence, have pushed the meaning of intimacy well beyond 'family', critiquing the highly politicised connotation of the term, and observing how the extension of marriage to same-sex couples also unchallenged preconceived cultural notions of 'appropriate' intimacies (Wilkinson, 2013: 206).

On a theoretical level, Sanger and Taylor (2013) point out the difficulty of defining intimacy. That said, Jamieson (2011: 1), broadly refers to it as a set of practices 'which enable, generate and sustain a subjective sense of closeness and being attuned and special to each other'. Furthermore, she associates this term to ideas of quality, care, trust, respect, honesty, freedom, choice, physical closeness, and reciprocity (Jamieson, 2011). Likewise, Weeks (2007) notes how in creating family ties, individuals are 'creating rational ethics in which individual needs and desires are balanced by commitment to each other', whilst experimenting a liberation from 'a sense of duty' and creating relationships that lean more to the 're-ordering' of meanings and construction of freely-chosen responsibilities that are 'neither predetermined nor contractual' (Weeks, 2007: 170). However, I would criticise Jamieson's (2011) and Weeks' (2007) take on intimacy, because as Golbourne et al. (2010) and this study will also argue, intimacy, particularly in relation to kin, is often difficult, not necessarily reciprocated (in terms of responsibilities or duty), free, or 'bursting' with choices for those concerned. While Weeks (2007) and

Jamieson (2011) paint a positive and desirable picture of intimacy, I am not sure that it is fully representative of the reality lived by many. In this sense, in chapter 5, section 5.3.1, I will explore how some of the transnational same-sex couples in this research negotiated and sustained their relationships with family members across time and space, in spite of the emotional difficulties, the complex power dynamics, and their feelings and experiences of alienation and 'un-belonging' while growing up. Likewise, as additional critique, Baldassar et al. (2016) remind us that, with the context of transnational migration, intimacy and emotions are often not experienced and performed face-to-face, but at a distance.

The start of this field of inquiry (if one can indeed label it as a 'field'), is associated to discursive and theoretical understandings of how people and institutions have understood sex and intimacy, as well as to culturally-specific debates on what family is or ought to be (Silva and Smart, 1999). The 1980s and 1990s came as a time of uncertainty in regard to sexual health (the HIV/AIDS crisis), and traditional verities and boundaries that were rapidly being undermined/blurred (Weeks et al., 2001). Accordingly, Berlant (1998) looked at how states actively framed intimacy in terms of dichotomous divisions (the normal/abnormal kinds, desirable/undesirable kinds of intimacies), and how this 'taxonomic action' ends up providing 'intelligibility' and a sense of comfort to a given community.

Indeed, new sexual stories were being told (Weeks et al., 2001). Suddenly what was unimaginable to say or see was everywhere, and although a lot of narrations were still in the shadows and waiting for their time, authors like Plummer (1995) were asking how new stories and understandings of sex and intimacy were not only being told, but also actively being discussed in the public sphere. The media and book editors were engaged, and average citizens were actively discussing them. In Plummer's (1995: 115) words:

Most stories that "take off" in a culture do so because they slot easily into the most accepted narratives of that society: the dominant ideological code. Others that are still not heard may fit less easily.

Among those stories that struggle to find a voice, we find new arrangements such as parenting across households, single-parent families, among others. These new arrangements 'reflect shifting moral subjectivities and moral rationalities both at the level of individuals and at the level of cultural significance' (Silva and Smart, 1999: 10).

Same-sex intimacies lie at the core of these patterns of kinship, love, and sexual relations (Gabb, 2001). The strength of cultural terms such as 'family' carry almost infinite political, academic, social and cultural meanings, values and expectations; and in a time where cultural narratives have somewhat divorced sexuality from reproduction, new opportunities of acceptance and visibility have emerged for same-sex couples, families and other non-normative arrangements (Bernstein and Reimann, 2001). However, these 'queer families' (Bernstein and Reimann, 2001) or 'families of choice' (Weston, 1998; Weeks et al., 2001) still face every day struggles as they negotiate their socio-political status in communities where some are still reluctant to accept them, and their right to create their own families. Indeed, 'while many LGBTs strive desperately for acceptance and understanding from mainstream society', others 'believe that queers are different and rightly challenge society's cherished norms about gender and the privatized heterosexual/nuclear family' (Bernstein and Reimann, 2001: 1). But whether they seek assimilation or transformation, it is clear that their lives and commitments are often constrained by institutions and cultural norms that do not meet their needs and expectations.

At the close of the twentieth century, studies on same-sex intimacies, kinship and families started to surface. Weeks et al. (2001), for instance, focused on how non-heterosexuals create 'meaningful, intimate relationships'; networks of friendships, negotiations of power at the household, values in relation to commitment, issues regarding parenting, and/or struggles over citizenship status, are all matters that have informed and shaped the way in which non-heterosexuals not only 'do' but idealise intimate life.

Others, however, inquired on the power dynamics still present in same-sex relationships (Jamieson, 1998) and how they disrupted the gendered expectations of intimate life (Giddens, 1992). Interestingly, sociologists like Plummer (1995) and Weeks (1991) addressed the links between new conceptions of intimacy and 'rites of a sexual story telling culture' (Plummer: 1995; Weeks: 1991), and later, as same-sex marriage started to become a legal reality in some territories in the West, empirical pieces inquiring on the lives and formalisation of these relationships started to see the light of the day (Heaphy et al., 2013). Finally, among the many other research possibilities, a rarely talked about subject is beginning to find a place in intimacy studies: caring and intimate practices and relationships constructed by older gay, lesbian and bisexual adults (King and Cronin, 2013).

2.3.2 On intimate and sexual citizenship

In a way, this thesis is the result of the proliferation and democratisation of intimate and sexual stories and narratives, which authors like Foucault (1979), Plummer (1995) and Weeks (1998 and 2007) have discussed in their own studies. Indeed, Plummer (1995) asserted that it was through storytelling that people imagined and reimagined who they were and what intimate life meant to them. But as intimate and sexual narratives became more 'public', so did the necessity to

develop on the concept of citizenship; this notion, after all, has been historically restricted – ‘racially, xenophobically, by gender and by sexuality’ (Weeks, 2007: 11).

As I indicated in the introduction of this thesis (Chapter 1, section 1.4.2), intimacy is a key element in this project. However, my recurrent concern and analysis of intimacy also requires me to reflect on how queers, like the participants in this research, materially experience intimacy in their daily lives; this exercise inevitably involves an examination of the notions of intimate and sexual citizenship in order to understand how these transnational same-sex couples have managed to stay legally together, and to achieve a sense of belonging and stability within their socio-political contexts. After all, their relationships exist at the complex intersection of sexuality and transnational migration, but also, at a time when many jurisdictions in the West are actively or in the process of recognising alternative ways of life and legal equality for homosexuals (Weeks, 2007).

Citizenship, according to Weeks (2007: 11) ‘is about belonging, about being recognized, about reciprocal entitlements and responsibilities.’ The literature on citizenship and its key aspects in relation to sexual and gender diversity has grown over the last few years (see for example: Evans, 1993; Monro, 2005; Phelan, 2001; Plummer, 1995, 2003; Prokhovnik, 1998; Richardson, 1998, 2000; and Weeks, 1998, 2007). Generally, this scholarship points out the extent of the assumptions upon which states have been built on, and ‘the ways in which minorities and deviants have been excluded from the rights and obligations of full citizenship’ (Weeks, 2007: 11). Interestingly, Evans (1993: 2) noted that although sexuality was always part of human culture, and at times ‘discreetly segregated from other social, political and economic structures,’ the late-twentieth century experienced ‘a sexualisation of... first world capitalist cultures.’ This has been partly noticeable with the intense commercialisation of sexual imagery and the heated discussions over the civil, political and social rights for sexual minorities. In this

regard, Weeks (1998: 32) stated that 'the separation of sexuality from the public has only intensified our interest in it, yet we still tend to regard the erotic as an arena of intensely private and personal experience, however noisy the public resonances.'

However, in order to continue my discussion, it is important for me to comment on the different definitions and possible variances between 'intimate citizenship' and 'sexual citizenship'. As I went through some of the main literature in this regard, I was not able to pinpoint their fundamental or obvious divergences, however; Donovan et al. (1999) and Weeks (1998; 2007), for example, use the term interchangeably, but others, like Richardson (1998, 2000), Evans (1993) and Plummer (1995, 2003) prefer one or the other. Initially, I would just argue that, as theorised by Plummer (2003), intimate citizenship's political project is broader in its aim – focusing on the emergence of new reproductive technologies, non-traditional intimate arrangements, LGBTQ rights and visibility – while sexual citizenship's politics focus on 'the sexual', and on non-heterosexual intimacies, predominantly.

In this sense, Weeks (1998: 39) construes 'the notion of intimate or sexual' citizenship as 'an attempt to remedy the limitations of earlier notions of citizenship, to make the concept more comprehensive'. Similarly, Donovan et al. (1999: 693), also use both terms, arguing that discussions over sexual or intimate citizenship were born out of an 'attempt to accommodate the growing numbers of people who either construct, or are allocated, their identities around sexuality and gender and who subsequently find themselves excluded from hegemonic understandings of citizenship'.

Plummer (1995: 151), on his part, strictly engages with 'intimate citizenship' and defines it as 'the control (or not) over one's body, feelings, relationships; access (or not) to representations, relationships, and public spaces; and socially grounded choices (or not) about identities, gender experiences.' Most of his later work will

expand on this initial definition, broadly conceiving intimate citizenship as a general framework that captures the complexity and changeability of personal life in the age of globalisation; 'intimate citizenship', for Plummer (2003), will seek the recognition of emerging new kinds of intimate practices and aspirations, and of the citizens that engage with them.

Sexual citizenship, on the other hand, was introduced by Evans (1993), and later developed by authors like Phelan (2001) and Richardson (1998, 2000). Some of the key components of sexual citizenship, for these authors, are: the right for free sexual expression, the importance of the body, institutional inclusion and the bridging of the private and the public spheres. More importantly, Evans' (2003) emphasis on the 'sexual' side of citizenship has been pivotal for exposing the erotic and heteronormative components of citizenship. In this regard, Phelan (2001) asserted that gay men and lesbians are 'strangers'. Her view was mainly that 'lesbians and gay men are not currently citizens in the full political sense, and that this exclusion is at the core of contemporary... understandings and organization of common life' (Phelan, 2001: 5). Phelan's (2001) critique on citizenship is shared by Canaday (2009) who claimed that 'as the state moved to enfranchise women... it was gradually working to construct a boundary in law and policy that by the mid-century explicitly defined the homosexual as the anticitizen.' (Canaday, 2009: 9).

The historical disenfranchisement of non-heterosexuals has led to recurrent discussions on the 'desirability' of models that incorporate them in 'mainstream citizenship'. During the 1990s, authors like Warner (1999) and Sullivan (1995) heavily debated the gay movement's politics of incorporation, while today, as gays and lesbians gain more visibility and acceptance – same-sex marriage being a reality in some Western nations – we now discuss the status of transgender, intersex and asexual people.

For Bell and Binnie (2000: 141), the strategies deployed by the project of sexual (and intimate) citizenship are 'marked by ambivalence'. Authors like Warner (1999) and Richardson (2000, 2005) are fierce in their critiques against 'normality' and for standing up for 'queer life' (Warner, 1999), but at the same time, I wonder if their analyses are actually insensitive to the practical realities of many, like migrants, or the poor, or those who lack the political, legal, economic and/or social privileges that these authors possess. In fact, as the participants in this thesis illustrate, the existence of same-sex marriage was a valuable and instrumental tool for guaranteeing the legal and material security of their relationships; 7 out of the 12 couples that participated in this research opted for marriage. In chapter 4, section 4.3, I will discuss this matter further as I enquire on how transnational same-sex partners interacted with different legal schemes, like marriage and citizenship/ resident applications, in order to guarantee the continuation and overall survival of their relationships.

2.3.3 Displaying families

Before going into the theoretical and analytical links between intimacy, ideas of home and material culture studies, I will engage here with the concept of 'displaying' family. Initially, this idea can be first traced to Morgan (1996), who understood the family as a feature of social life and a set of meaningful activities, rather than an institution where individuals necessarily belong. For Morgan (1996: 186), the family 'represents a quality rather than a thing.'

In regards to those 'meaningful activities', Morgan (1996: 190) describes family practices as everyday actions and 'little fragments of daily life' that routinely constitute our social worlds. This means, however, that an individual's understanding of family is subject to change over time, largely depending on one's

life story. This changeability of meaning later led Morgan (1996:193-4) to conceptualise family as something that is continuously re-imagined and practiced.

Following Morgan's (1996) analysis, Finch (2007: 66) argues that 'families need to be "displayed" as well as "done"', hence focusing her analysis not on the actions themselves, but on the ones that are 'publically' used to 'emphasize the fundamentally social nature of family practices'. Display is defined by Finch (2007: 67) as 'the process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions do constitute "doing family things" and thereby confirm that these relationships are "family" relationships'. In other words, effective family practices can only be recognised as such if others understand them as actions that are in fact associated with what is socially conceived as 'family'.

Finch's (2007) analysis is important when considering what and who people (individually and collectively considered) recognise as family. Furthermore, her argument exposes the ever-shifting meaning of family, the fluidity of families over time, and the relationship between personal and family identities. Studies by Morgan (1999), Weeks et al. (2001), Gorman-Murray (2008) and (King and Cronin, 2013) for example, illustrate how individuals reaffirm their familial connections as they move through life and change their ways of living. Morgan (1999) for instance, insists on the necessity to leave nostalgic ideas of what family 'was' or 'ought to be' behind in order to respond more effectively (in terms of social policy and research) to contemporary everyday needs in relation to caring, intimacy and kinship. On the other side, Gorman-Murray (2008) and King and Cronin (2013) illustrate how relationships and identities are actively sustained through various means: material and domestic activities (Gorman-Murray, 2008) and through caring practices in older age (King and Cronin, 2013).

Likewise, Finch (2007) further points out that personal narratives (an essential component of this study) also play an important role in 'displaying' familial and intimate practices. Accordingly, 'narratives are seen as stories which people tell to themselves and to others about their own family relationships, which enable them to be understood and situated as part of an accepted repertoire of what 'family' means' (Finch, 2007: 78). Thus, narratives do not necessarily project what people really 'do', but rather act as vehicles through which people connect their own experiences with socially recognised modes of kinship and family. The role of narratives in displaying families is a key matter in this research; as I will discuss further in chapter 3, section 3.5.1, the narrative interviews performed for this study demanded an in-depth reflection on how the research participants construed, but also 'performed' their personal stories for me, as well as for their partners.

In a recent qualitative study, Almack (2008) puts Finch's (2007) argument on 'displaying' into action as she examined the ways in which lesbian couples and their children negotiate their relationships with the family of origin. This included 'the working out of new kin relationships between their child and their families of origin, the extent to which these relationships were recognized and validated, and also a consideration of the extent to which family members come out about the lesbian parent family within their own networks (Almack, 2008: 1194-5). Hence, the attention paid to 'display' in this research evidenced the degrees of people's commitments, the individual and collective need to sustain family and kin networks, and the increasing diversity of non-heterosexual arrangements.

However, some of the authors like Heaphy (2011) and McIntosh et al. (2011) critiqued the term of 'displaying families' for being too restrictive and proposed ways of rethinking and extending the concept. First, there was a concern with the issue of audience – 'who constitutes the audience for display and who controls whether, and the degree to which, an activity is recognised as a display of family' (Dermott and Seymour, 2011: 13), and secondly, should the term go beyond 'the

family'? Heaphy (2011) for instance, thinks that 'displaying' in other social relations also deserve attention, and Dermott and Seymour debate on the applicability and desirability of options like 'displaying intimacy' or 'displaying friends', depending on the context, research and/or time. Whatever the choices, the notion of 'displaying families' shows the complexity of contemporary family (and intimate) life. After all, intimacy and kinship is 'an area of life in which people invest their emotions, their creative energy, and their new imaginings' (Carsten, 2004: 9; in Dermott and Seymour, 2011: 18). The participants in this study certainly engaged in 'displaying coupledness' during my fieldwork with them, particularly when interviewing them.

2.3.4 Love from a distance and transnational care

'Distant love', written by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2014) set out to explore the intimate and familial dimensions of globalisation. Without a doubt, this book served as a much needed contribution in sociology when it came to understanding the complex and multifaceted intersections between intimacy and migration in the 21st Century, and it was certainly, a key theoretical starting point for this thesis. The book examined 'love at a distance', and most importantly, how family members and lovers are embedded in the multi-layered emotional and material complexities of migration and globalisation. Additionally, the book explores questions of power, inequality, economic migration, and how communications media, information and medical technologies play out in transnational migration. However, their efforts in examining same-sex relationships are rather limited. Most of their research in this sense is directed at examining the ways in which homosexual and heterosexual partners today are still striving to find greater degrees of equality in their intimacy, and how globalisation is helping to expose the nuances and opportunities in that quest.

The core of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2014) work here is the investigation and analysis of the lives of those who they refer to as 'world families', by which they mean 'love relationships and other forms of relationship between people living in, or coming from, different countries or continent' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2014: 2). In fact, I agree with Fink (2014: 1238) in her review of this book, when she argued that the analyses here were 'predominantly clustered around (heterosexual) coupledness, parenthood and the parent-child-carer', therefore missing out on a wider scope of personal relationships existent today. This is why I found their attempts of engaging with same-sex couples so disappointing; in spite of them using such working term – 'world families' – and of doing their best effort to be inclusive, they eventually failed to account for important and current intimate developments and stories being lived and told in the LGBTQ circles. Nevertheless, the identified research gap presents itself as an opportunity for this study to step in and investigate the matter further.

More recently, King-O'Riain (2016) builds on Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2014) work by exploring how mixed intercultural couples endure long-distance love, and how partners eventually migrate and perform love once physically together. Through interviews carried out a heterosexual and same-sex couples, this paper illustrated how distance, globalisation, geography intersect and shape the way people conceive and practice love and relationships. Equally, it also serves as important previous academic work studying some of the issues that this research deals with, like discourses around emotions, coupledness, display and transnational family practices. Moreover, King O'Riain's (2016) work is especially significant when I discuss how the transnational same-sex couples in this study experienced periods of long-distance love, as well as the strategies and challenges that followed in order for them to be together – see section 5.2.1 of chapter 5 for the empirical discussion over this matter.

2.3.5 Friendships with kin and non-kin

The idea that friendship is defined by the 'continuous creation of personal will and choice... ungoverned by the structural definitions that bear on family and kinship... grounded in the unique and irreplaceable qualities of partners, defined and valued independently of their place in public systems of kinship, power, utility and esteem, and of any publically defined status' (Silver, 1996; in Jamieson, 1998: 105). But according to Jamieson (1998: 105), such definition is 'a pervasive public story rather than everyday lived reality'. Indeed, she argues that this 'symmetrical' and ideal of 'pure relationship' does not allow for the messiness, neediness and complexities that are actually present in people's personal lives. While I somewhat agree with her argument, I think it is more important to emphasise how friendships become vital in one's life-cycle, how they change, and how context and proximity play a significant role in their development, particularly in the non-heterosexual world, as emphasised in this research.

In this sense, Pahl (2000), Spencer and Pahl (2006), Weeks et al. (2001), Weston (1991), have mapped the significance of friendship in the midst of changing family forms in the late 20th Century / early 21st Century. Within the gay community, Weeks (2007) makes use of Spencer and Pahl's (2006; in Weeks, 2007) words, what they call 'hidden solidarities', to refer to the unity, shared sentiments, and overall community existent within these individuals; without being overly idealistic about these friendships, Weeks (2007) does point out that friendships have enabled homosexuals to develop their identities, creative lives, and have also provided protection against hostile and homophobic surroundings. Equally, he suggests that gay friendships 'open up new possibilities of loving, befriending and relating which challenge the narrow solidarities of traditional families', and that they also provide 'a web of support and security which is particularly important in times of rapid change' (Weeks, 2007: 179).

Though I find the work of Weeks (2007), Weeks et al. (2001) and Weston (1991) quite meaningful and persuasive, I found their 'families of choice' thesis far more nuanced than they suggest, at least today and in regards to the participants in this research. In fact, like Heaphy et al. (2013), I was surprised to find that, although friends are significant to the research participants, their narratives seemed to bestow greater importance to their relationships and personal commitments to family relatives. In chapter 5, section 5.3.2, for example, when discussing friendships, participant Federica decided to ponder her close relationship with her brother, as the ultimate friendship. The works of Spencer and Pahl (2006), Pahl (2000) and Bowlby (2011) are helpful in understanding this, as they stress the changes in the conceptions of adult friendship-like bonds in the West, which are made up of a variety of patterns and types, and are not confined to non-kin bonds. Likewise, the same authors highlight that the importance of these ties relies on the quality of bonds, beyond blood relations (Spencer and Pahl, 2006).

In the end, friendships (kin and non-kin) seemed to add to the emotional and home-related landscapes of the research participants. Transnational migration, in particular, also seemed to exacerbate the need for ontological and personal security. Therefore, sustaining friendships across geographies and time, as well as creating and fostering new ones locally, seemed to be just as important.

2.4 Reviewing the meanings of home

'Home' is at the centrepiece of this research; hence, understanding the different ways in which this concept may be construed, experienced and/or imagined, is important for the on-going discussions throughout this thesis – particularly in chapter 6, which is devoted to the empirical analysis of home. It is appropriate to start a theoretical discussion on 'home' by arguing that a definite and singular definition of it may not be possible. In fact, Mallett (2004), Tucker (1994) and

Blunt and Dowling (2006) indicated the multidisciplinary, porous and changeable meaning of this word: indeed, home may be identified with '(a) place(s), (a) space(s), feeling (s), practices, and/or an active state of being in the world' (Mallett, 2004: 62) or related to 'house, family haven, self, gender, and journeying' (Ibid.). Similarly, Tucker (1994: 181) indicated that '[h]ome is usually a multi-level structure that combines several single-level homes, such as an emotional home, a geographical home, a cultural home etc.'

Such distinctions and variations over what home may be or how it might 'feel' to be at home are important, as they add textures and insight to an apparently 'unambiguous' term. Certainly, 'home is much more than house or household... Whilst house and household are components of home, on their own they do not capture the complex socio-spatial relations and emotions that define home... A house is not necessarily nor automatically a home' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 3).

Certainly, discussions over the meaning of home could lead into many different directions. However, in the subsections that follow, I examine the most relevant perspectives and analytical dimensions of home relative to this research². Specifically, I investigate the notion of 'the ideal home', the importance of the physical/material home, the activities and practices around 'doing' home, and finally, the relationship between home and migration.

2.4.1 A House is not a home: on the materiality and ownership of home

Mallett (2004) and Flanders (2014) trace the historical antecedents (in the West) of the terms 'home' and 'house' back to early German and Anglo-Saxon words like *ham*, *Heim* or *heem*, meaning village or town (Hollander, 1991; in Mallett, 2004:

² For in-depth and comprehensive readings on the different meanings of home across different disciplines (particularly archeology, geography, history, cultural studies and sociology) refer to Blunt and Dowling (2006), Mallett (2004) and Hollows (2008).

65). Hollander's work (1990, in Mallett, 2004) makes important differentiations between sites of dwelling and the practices around domesticity and home, reasserting the importance given, from very early on, to the materiality of homes. In addition to this, Flanders (2014) focuses on the historical anthropology of the European and North American home, as she discusses the practices, rituals and 'fashioning' activities that have, over time, transformed houses into 'homely homes' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). This historical background is important for this project, as I try to understand how people, like the migrant same-sex partners in this research, are able to practice 'home' in spite of the uncertainty or fragility of a physical 'house'.

Nevertheless, Bowlby et al. (1997), Douglas (1991; in Rapport and Dawson, 1998) and Dupuis and Thorns (1996, 1998) emphasise the importance of physical features in narratives of home in the West. Douglas (1991; in Rapport and Dawson, 1998) indicates the ongoing human need to control space and, how home 'easily became a synonym for "house", within which space and time were structured functionally, economically, aesthetically and morally, so that the coordinated workings of home were seen to give on to an "embryonic" or "virtual community"' (Douglas, 1991; in Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 6). To this, Mallett (2004: 66) adds that capitalism and neoliberalism nurture this materialistic idea of home, 'as means of selling real estate and promoting "home ownership" in modern times'. As the data chapters on home (chapter 6) and migration (chapter 4) will show, the physicality of home is not only relevant but quite central to the stories told by the research participants; owning a house or a flat, and exercising activities around that factual dwelling site, like designing it and 'improving' it was pivotal to understandings and, most importantly, experiences of home.

Literature on home ownership is diverse, and its intersections with ontological security and familial narratives are of particular interest. Accordingly, Madigan et al. (1990) and Dupuis and Thorns (1996, 1998) argued that home ownership is

strongly associated to ontological security, continuity of self-identity, and a need for personal and familial security. In the words of Dupuis and Thorns (1998: 24), 'home can provide a locale in which people can work at attaining a sense of ontological security in a world that at times is experienced as threatening and uncontrollable'. In addition to this, Gurney (1999) and Madigan et al. (1990) noted that physical homes often embody personal identity, but also, according to Chapman and Hockey (1999) and Clarke (2001), social and cultural expectations and aspirations around family life, the 'ideal home', and domesticity.

Ownership as discussed above also leads me to discuss the relationship between the public and the private. Often, when we talk about ownership, we tend to associate this with exclusivity and privacy, yet, authors like Hollows (2008), Miller (2001) and Clarke (2001) problematize such claim. Indeed, Clarke (2001) demonstrates that the relationship between the private and the public is far from simple. His study discussed the proliferation of home-improvement and design, and argued that the relationship (between both spheres) 'was never simply between an internal private sphere and an external public sphere, but a more complex process of projection and interiorization that continues to evolve'. Indeed, Clarke (2001) shows that the process of decorating and 'doing' home often represents the discrepancies and contradictions of people's encounters with wider society. Similarly, other authors like Hollows (2008) also deliberate on the complexities between the private and public spheres, indicating how the boundaries between both spaces 'are drawn and redrawn, policed and negotiated, resisted and reinstated' (Hollows, 2008: 117). So, in a way, ownership does not necessarily endorse 'privacy', it just commodifies, redefines and resignifies social and cultural relations.

Likewise, Hollows (2008: 117) has also referred to the 'dislocation' and mobility of home; that is, to the range of practices, values and materiality that have, in effect, further blurred the boundaries between private and public. Williams (1983) and

Sheller (2004, in Hollows, 2008), for example, identified the way in which cars have challenged straightforward understandings of the private and the public. Suitably, in chapter 6 (Section 6.3.2), under ownership and home, I will discuss the meanings and markers of domesticity and 'homeliness' that cars have provided for one of the participant couples. Certainly, cars have problematized the way we think about private or public spaces, as they hybridize both spheres (Sheller and Urry, 2003), while also providing a sense of ontological security, or, in other words, of constancy, domesticity and reliability (Dupuis and Thorns, 1998). Other authors have recognised the TV (McCarthy, 2001), and iPods and mobile phones (Bull, 2005) as other examples of how home and domestic elements are mobilized in contemporary society.

2.4.2 Imagining home

A considerable part of this study's empirical chapter on home (chapter 6) is dedicated to how participants idealise or imagine home – what, where and how it ought to be. Appropriately, the existent literature on home has recurrent references to the symbolic potential and romanticism around this notion. Somerville (1992), for instance, considers that both, the reality of home and the ideal of home, are integral and necessary to the overall knowledge of home. Similarly, Rapport and Dawson (1998: 8) insisted that home 'can and must compass cultural norms and individual fantasies, representations of and by individuals and groups'. Thus, Jackson (1995: 122-23) wrote that home 'is always lived as a relationship, a tension... [L]ike any word we use to cover a particular field of experience, [home] always begets its own negation... [It] may evoke security in one context and seem confining in another'. Hence, both Jackson (1995) and Somerville (1992) point out the blurriness of fantasy and reality in human life.

Imagining home, searching for home, according to Tucker (1994) may also be closely associated with efforts to achieve self-fulfilment, whatever that means to each individual (the degree or existence of emotional attachments to places, persons or intellectual environments changes from person to person). This is why '[m]ost people spend their lives in search of home, at the gap between the natural home and the particular ideal home where they would be fully fulfilled' (Tucker, 1994: 184). Thus, romanticising home, often leaves a feeling of 'homelessness', or the inability to fulfil oneself in one's environment: 'Homelessness... it is a state of lack of self-fulfilment, control of one's physical environment, lack of emotional comfort, absence of intellectual stimuli, state of utter loneliness' (Tucker, 1994: 184). Interestingly, section 4.2 in chapter 4, and section 6.2.3 in chapter 6, will discuss the ongoing feelings of uncertainty and anxiety (dare I say, homelessness?) that participants express throughout their narratives; I will examine, for instance, how the migratory and transnational experiences have shaped the participants' views on home, and how they constantly reassert their relationships and their home-related and domestic practices through materiality and storytelling.

Finally, Rapport and Dawson (1998) transcend the material and traditional understandings of home by arguing that previous experiences of home and memories through one's life cycle are also central to the configuration of 'home'. In their words, '[h]ome brings together memory and longing, the ideational, the affective and the physical, the spatial and the temporal, the local and the global, the positively evaluated and the negatively' (Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 8). This take on home will inform the way in which I analyse the participants' idealisations and expectations in 'building home' (chapter 6, section 6.2), but also, the ways in which they reconceptualise the past and reengage with challenging familial relationships (See: Chapter 5, Section 5.3.1.5– *Alienation and feelings of unbelonging*). As Simmel puts it, 'home' represents a 'unique synthesis' of one's experience, thus far: 'an aspect of life and at the same time a special way of

forming, reflecting and interrelating the totality of life' (Simmel, 1984: 93-4; in Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 8).

2.4.3 The transnational home

This subsection discusses the effects and consequences of transnational mobility on one's perceptions of home as a concept, a feeling and an experience. This intersection is at the core of this research project, as it interrogates how transnational same-sex partners construe and practice home. As mentioned before, chapter 6 is devoted to this discussion, which will highlight the different approaches followed by participants in order to 'feel at home', 'build a home', manage homes 'here' and 'there', among other matters.

In the introductory paragraphs of this section I made reference to the complexities and multi-layered nature of home. In this regard, I agree with Blunt and Dowling (2006: 196) when they argue that '[t]he multi-scalarity of home is particularly apparent in relation to transnational home'. Ultimately, transnationalism brings important issues to the fore, as it exposes the ways in which globalisation, multiple identities and allegiances, technology, physical and emotional geographies, and current understandings and practices of intimacy affect the idea of home (Blunt and Dowling, 2006).

Existing literature on migration and transnationalism is varied, and it often poses challenging questions and statements about home. For instance, Ahmed et al. (2003: 8) ask '[h]ow are homes made in the context of migration? And what, having left home, might it mean to return?' And more suggestively, Al-Ali and Koser (2002: 7-8) pose three important questions: '[h]ow do transnational social fields and practices manifest themselves in daily lives, and how (if at all) do they impact on abstract conceptualizations of home? To what extent is "home" for transnational migrants no longer tied to a specific geographical place? To what

extent do transnational migrants conceive of more than one “home”, with compelling allegiances changing through time?’ These questions cover complex issues already discussed in the previous section, like the intersections of home with memory, experience and one’s life-cycle, and fantasy. However, as these questions illustrate, and as I will discuss it in the following paragraphs, migration and transnationalism further destabilize traditional notions of ‘home’.

According to Al-Ali and Koser (2002: 1), ‘[t]he changing relationship between migrants and their “homes” is held to be an almost quintessential characteristic of transnational migration.’ As it will be showcased later in the empirical chapters, the lived experiences and referents of ‘home’ for transnational migrants revolve in different ways and into different directions: the childhood home, ‘the homeland’, return journeys, the current home and the home-making practices around it, and the multiple intersections between belonging, identity and personal biography. Indeed, several contexts – a sense of simultaneity even – inform transnational migrants’ life and conceptions over home. In the transnational context, ‘the assumption that people will live their lives in one place, according to one set of national and cultural norms, in countries with impermeable borders, no longer holds... [M]ore and more people... belong to two or more societies at the same time’ (Levitt, 2004).

Contrary to some literature on transnational migration which conceived the homeland as a primary referent for transnational and diasporic subjects (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998, for example), works by Brah (1996) and Ahmed et al. (2003) directly intervene in this area ‘to rethink the assumption that “home”, in migration, is simply something we “leave behind”’ (Ahmed et al., 2003: 8). In fact, Ahmed et al. (2003: 8) insist on ‘home’ not simply being a category distinct and antithetical of ‘migration’, but actually interdependent, ‘without then assuming home is fixed prior to the experience of migration’. In section 2.2.5.2 of this literature review, for example, I referred to Fortier’s work (2001, 2003) on queer migration narratives,

as she described the *in-betweenness* and ever-present feeling of home: the childhood home, the present and the future constantly interact to shape one's conception of what 'home' is or ought to be. Similarly, Wiles' (2008) study of New Zealanders in London pointed out in a comparable direction, as she argued that her participants' sense of home between New Zealand and Britain is in constant flux, partly resisting a collective imaginary of New Zealand as home, and also through material homing and domestic practices – i.e. the role of material objects, places, and information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as Skype. Appropriately, the empirical chapters (chapters 4, 5 and 6) will discuss how transnational same-sex couples construe their migratory journeys (most evidently in section 4.2 of chapter 4), how they interact with ICT technologies to defy geographical distance (sections 5.2.1 and 5.3.1.1 in chapter 5), and how all of this harbours and sustains a sense of home that captures their journey thus far, the geographical distances, the childhood home and daily practices of domesticity and décor (Chapter 6).

This 'construction' of home can be defined as 'homing', as it 'entails processes of home-building... whether at home or in migration' (Ahmed et al., 2003: 9). 'Homing desires' will be key for understanding the tensions and negotiations between 'the ideal home' (as discussed in section 2.4.2 of this chapter), and the reality of transnational life; indeed, Boccagni (2017:23) construes 'homing' as the different ways in which people are able to manage 'the variable distance between the real home conditions and the aspired ones, in terms of emplaced familiarity, security and control over one's life circumstances'. As he further argues, the 'gap between the "real" and the "ideal" side of home' is a 'latent' facet of the search for home in transnational migration (Boccagni, 2017: 23). Homing, then, becomes a practice in which migrants engage with in order to create 'soils of significance' (Hoffman, 1989: 278; in Ahmed et al. 2003: 9), or spaces and places in which, through daily affective and material rituals, they can reinvent and reclaim the experience of

'home'. Similarly, Ahmed et al. (2003: 9) add to this by insisting on homing as the action of actually 'making home' in migration, hence of affective memory in action and the 'creating both pasts and futures through inhabiting the grounds of the present'.

2.4.4 Queer diaspora studies and the idea/experience of home

Earlier in this chapter (section 2.2.5.2) I briefly examined the theoretical approaches of home as construed by queer diaspora scholars like Fortier (2003). In this section, I aim to expand more on this issue, as I try to connect this theory with the research participants' ideals and experiences of home. Indeed, Rouhani (2015: 359) indicated that queer diaspora scholars 'approach the home outside of the narrative of "homecoming" and instead use one that engages with multiple negotiations with past and future...' This follows Fortier's (2003) and Mai and King's (2009); the former, for example, questioning the fixity of home, and arguing that this concept exists and is constantly 're-membered' (Fortier, 2003) through movement and attachment:

Home is lived in motions: the motions of journeying between homes, the motions of hailing ghosts from the past, the motions of leaving or staying put, of 'moving on' or 'going back,' the motions of cutting or adding, the motions of continual reprocessing of what home is/was/might have been. 'But, "home" is also re-membered by attaching it, even momentarily, to a place where we strive to make home and to bodies and relationships that touch us, or have touched us, in a meaningful way' (Fortier, 2003: 131).

This approach requires studying the home as unsettled and multi-layered. In this way, Rouhani (2015: 359) defines the diasporic home 'simultaneously as a

materially grounding space, a space with complex meanings and attachments, and as a space where multiple forms and scales of power relations intersect... It is dynamic, destabilized space in motion, with complex links to the past, present, and future.' The integration of the queer component into the idea of the diasporic home has also brought about interesting conversations that disturb traditional understandings of home and belonging, and desires of home and attachment. Garvey (2011), for example, used the concept of 'queer (un)belonging' to refer to the problems of belonging experienced by queer migrants in relation to diasporic 'homeland' and cultural nostalgia. In the end, Garvey's (2011) work is an invitation to identify and analyse 'difference' within seemingly coherent, uniform communities, in this case, diaspora.

As a result, the work on queer diaspora will be important for the analyses of home, as construed and experienced by the participants in this research. As chapter 6 will illustrate, home was often interpreted in terms of the past (the childhood home) but also creatively and positively towards the enabling possibilities of the future. Equally, (un)belonging will also be studied, though more in chapter 5, in particular, as two of the participants reassess their difficult and complex memories in relation to their upbringing and cultural backgrounds. Those narratives will reveal the repercussions and lessons of un-belonging in one's personal life, but by the same token, they will also make the connections between sense of belonging and the idea of home rather evident.

In the following section, I will explain how the inclusion of material culture narratives (and its analyses) strengthens the study of the complex intersections between home, migration and queerness. In this way, I wish to demonstrate the power of materiality in reflecting and representing people's sense of belonging, security and intimacy; ultimately, these materialist readings of the home and migration serve as important theoretical and empirical background for our understanding of how gay, lesbian and bisexual transnational migrants, like the

ones in this research, manage feelings of uncertainty, and reaffirm their sexual identities through material culture and daily practices at the home(s).

2.5 Materialist readings of home, mobile intimacies and sexual identity

'We express ourselves as part of this society through the way we live and use objects... The things that we relate to have embodied within them the social relations that gave rise to them through their design, the work of producing them, their prior use, the intention to communicate through them and their place within an existing cultural system of objects.'

Dant (1999: 2)

The material realities of 'home' were one of the main topics of conversation in the previous section. Home, as an identifiable physical place or dwelling, can provide the means for studying the material and imaginative meanings inscribed in domestic spaces, objects and design (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). As Noble (2004: 254) claims, 'objects play a key role in the formation and sedimentation of familial and interpersonal relations of these lifeworlds through representing histories and experiences and through being ritual objects around which the family can be performed'. Decorations, portraits, food, among other 'things', carry important meanings that together, build a holistic sense of who we are (Gorman-Murray, 2008).

In this final section of the literature review, I will show how authors across different disciplines like cultural geography, interior design and anthropology have linked

material culture to everyday practices and life in the domestic arena. Dant (1999: 70), after all, has argued that 'the home is a site for material expression by people that is unparalleled elsewhere in their lives'. Together, these studies illustrate how the study of transnational same-sex intimacies may be enriched by paying attention to the material culture present in the private/domestic sphere. Firstly, I will briefly discuss some empirical studies that expose the role of material culture in mobility and migration, and then, I will finish by commenting on the work of Gorman Murray (2006, 2008), Cook (2014) and Potvin (2014), whose research focuses on materiality and domestic spaces in gay and lesbian households.

2.5.1 Intimate objects and mobility

This thesis is interested in material objects and mobility; certainly, material culture possesses the ability to connect people across time and distance, to signify emotions, and/ or to affect people throughout their migratory journeys (Svašek, 2012b). In the essay titled 'On Diasporic Intimacy', Boym (1998) provides an analysis of how Russian diasporas in the United States use domestic objects, such as Russian 'knick-knacks' and souvenirs as vehicles for the remembrance of the childhood home and the construction of domestic spaces. Her study of immigrant households reveals 'the fragmentary biography of the inhabitant and a display of collective memory... They (objects at the home) set the state for intimate experiences' (Boym, 1998: 521-522). In the same lines, she later comments:

Diasporic souvenirs are not altars to the unhappiness of émigrés, but rather places for communication and conversation... Diasporic intimacy is possible only when one masters a certain imperfect aesthetics of survival and learns to inhabit exile. Diasporic intimacy is an affectionate farewell

*to the motherland. It has an accent – in both languages,
foreign and native.*

(Boym, 1998: 524).

Likewise, Svašek (2012b: 19) asserts that '[d]iasporic groups often use material culture to create and emphasize shared identities and highlight ongoing connections with the homeland'. Throughout the empirical chapters of this thesis, I will discuss different examples of how same-sex couples use material culture 'from home' to display attachments, or strengthen their sense of belonging to their countries, kin, and cultures of origin. Additionally, Svašek (2012b: 16) also mentions the importance of gifts in the context of transnational migration, as they may "'stand for" distant loved ones, and multi-sensorial engagement with "objects from home" may be an important way for migrants to evoke positive memories of far-away places and people... and inform a sense of transnational "extended self"'. Gifts given to participants by kin and friends will also be examined, as I explore the different feelings that this materiality evoked in the couples' narratives about their connections and attachments with friends and family 'here' and 'there' (chapter 5, section 5.3).

On his part, Marcoux's (2001: 69) study highlights the role played by mobile possessions in securing memory 'in motion'. His ethnographic study explored the relationship between material culture and mobility, particularly looking at 'what people bring with them when they move, what are the things that matter when the time to move comes, why they matter and how they come to matter' (Marcoux, 2001: 70). The research considers to the process of 'sorting out things' that people carry out before moving to a new place, and eventually argues that 'the things people move with them are at the heart of the constitution of a memory which often resists displacements' (Marcoux, 2001: 70). Moreover, such process of 'sorting out' becomes a method of deciding and defining what matters, 'as if wanting to better remember' (Marcoux, 2001: 85).

The role played by material possessions in securing memory has been emphasised by Parkin (1999), who, while studying the experience of refugees and the outcomes of forcible human displacement, argued that 'peoples carry not only what they need for subsistence and exchange purposes but also, if they can, articles of sentimental value which both inscribe and are inscribed by their own memories of self and personhood' (Parkin, 1999: 304). Pieces of art, ritual objects, pictures, among other artefacts, serve less practical purposes, but 'taken under pressure and in crisis set up contexts less of use and more of selective remembering, forgetting and envisioning' (Parkin, 1999: 304).

On the relationship between material culture and migration, Tolia-Kelly (2004a, 2004b) and McMillan (2006, 2009) offer analyses of the lived landscapes and domestic scenes of post-colonial migrants living in Britain. McMillan (2006, 2009), for instance, examines the meanings of the West Indian front room – a location within the home that 'expressed a yearning for social mobility... and was only used if there were guests or on special occasions' (McMillan, 2006: 256). Often 'displaying' was more important than the authenticity of the objects (fake flowers or fruit for instance) as patterned carpets and wallpapers rarely matched each other. Also, a romantic version of an England home in a 'tropical' climate was present in the ornaments and furniture (McMillan, 2009), subtly creating a 'transcultural contact zone' (McMillan, 2009: 145) that mediated Creole traditions with white Victorian values. But similarly to Boym's (1998) research, the front room as a phenomenon existed as a place of conversation between the past, present and future, rather than a mere elegiac shrine to 'the motherland': 'the front room resonates across diaspora, but this is metaphorical, rather than a search for the pure and authentic homeland, it lives through and with a conception of identity as process: disruptive and continuous' (McMillan, 2006: 257).

Similarly, Tolia-Kelly (2004a, 2004b) shows how South Asian and East African homes embodied connections with past homes and family life experienced pre-

migration; 'photographs, pictures and paintings, are given meaning and value beyond their textual context' (Tolia-Kelly, 2004b: 675) and are essential means for the ontological security and sense of belonging of South Asian women living in the UK. Moreover, collecting and displaying visual and material cultures serve as vehicles for the enfranchisement of respectability and citizenship: 'Through the incorporation of the materials of visual cultures in the South Asian home, the lived landscapes of the past assist the new configurations of identity in Britain' (Tolia-Kelly, 200b: 685). Moreover, this constant investment in domestic display has important connections with the term 'displaying families', which was discussed earlier in this chapter – section 2.3.3; indeed, in the need to seem 'respectable', familial, and British, yet still faithful to South Asian traditions, these people performed and presented their homes, and their domestic lives, in particular ways.

2.5.2 The agency of (transnational) objects

As discussed in the previous section, materiality that is transferred from one geographical location to another can signify personal relationships and attachments to other people, and 'things'. Likewise, it can evoke strong emotional reactions and memories once it has been placed in a new context (Svašek, 2012b). This assertion refers to the fact that people are not only 'affected', or experience emotions, when surrounded by other human beings. Correspondingly, in section 2.2.2.2, when discussing emotions, I stated that '[r]elevant others... are not only other human beings, but also include nonhuman phenomena such as animals, landscapes, artefacts and works of art' (Svašek, 2007: 230).

Given this, as I theorise material culture 'on the move', or 'in transit', and its impact on this study, it is important to explore subject-object relationships further. Gell (1998: 17) provides an interesting perspective, in this regard, arguing that artefacts acquire agency once they become part in the 'texture of social

relationships'. Thus, he continued his argument stating that '[t]he immediate "other" in a social relationship does not have to be another "human being"', and that '[s]ocial agency can be exercised relative to "things" and social agency can be exercised by "things"...' (Gell, 1998: 17). Gell's (1998) theoretical perspective undermines the idea that human beings are in full control of their man-made environments (Gell, 1998; Svašek, 2012b), and for further clarity, the following example can illustrate his idea more clearly:

Consider a little girl with her doll. She loves her doll. Her doll is her best friend (she says). Would she toss her doll overboard from a lifeboat in order to save her bossy elder brother from drowning? No way. This may seem like a trivial example, and the kinds of relations small girls form with their dolls are far from "typical" of human social behaviour. But it is not a trivial example at all... We only think it is not because it is an affront to our dignity to make comparisons between small girls showering affection on their dolls and us, mature souls, admiring Michelangelo's David. But what is David if it is not a big doll for grown-ups? This is not really a matter of devaluing David so much as revaluing little girls' dolls, which are truly remarkable objects, all things considered. They are certainly social beings - "members of the family", for a time at any rate.

(Gell, 1998: 18)

Alluding to Gell's (1998) point, Svašek (2007: 230) asserts that 'people frequently experience and discursively construct the things that surround them as subject-like phenomena'. Moreover, Svašek's research (2007, 2012b) adds important layers of analysis to the study of material culture's agency in the emotional life of migrants. The key terms in her theorising on the matter are transit, transition, and

transformation (Svašek, 2012b). *Transit*, 'describes the movements of people, objects and images through time and space', and it also points out 'the changing social, cultural and spatial environments constituted by objects and individuals before and after coming into contact with each other, as well as the process and occasion by which contact is made' (Svašek, 2012b: 2). On its part, *transition* 'identifies transit-related changes in the meaning, value and emotional efficacy of objects and images as opposed simply to changes in their location or ownership' (Svašek, 2012b: 3). Here, mass-produced objects, for example, acquire particular meanings and subjective value for each buyer. Similarly, in the empirical chapters of this thesis I will give examples of how ordinary objects, like a yoghurt-maker (Image 6), a dog-shaped lamp (Image 31), or a mug (Image 29), can become of exceptional significance for their owners. Finally, *transformation* 'refers to transit-related changes in human subjects, especially in terms of their status, identity formation and emotional subjectivity... situated identities and emotional subjectivities change, either temporarily or leading to more permanent personal change (Svašek, 2012b: 5).

In all, Svašek's (2007, 2012b) theorising on subject-object relations, along with her take on emotions (as previously discussed in section 2.2.2 of this chapter), will be fundamental for my analyses on objects as primary and/or secondary agents in human social life. As I hope to show, the various objects featured in this thesis, from food to mundane materiality like pins or music CDs, will enable particular narratives about migration, relationality, home, and emotions. Likewise, such stories will also reveal the different ways in which participants came into contact with those artefacts – how the objects' value and meaning changed over time, and how processes of migration, re-adaptation, identity-building, belonging, and 'homing' (Ahmed et al., 2003; Boccagni, 2017) also changed participants and materiality alike.

Similarly, the work of Miller (1987, 1998, 2001, 2008, 2010) adds important insights and depth to the discussion on materiality, agency, and subject-object ambiguity. In general, his theoretical stance evokes a central dialectic perspective, 'in which material objects are viewed as integral and inseparable of all relationships' (Miller, 2008: 286). In *Stuff*, for example, Miller (2010) argued that things make us as much as we make them; in fact, the on-going theme, and purpose of that book, was to challenge the 'common-sense opposition between the person and the thing, the animate and the inanimate, the subject and the object' (Miller, 2010: 5). Elsewhere, he further asserted that '[t]he authenticity of artefacts as culture derives, not from their relationship to some historical style or manufacturing process... but rather from their active participation in a process of self-creation in which they are directly constitutive of our understanding of ourselves and others' (1987: 215).

In this sense, Miller (1987, 2008, 2010) affirms and complements the ideas of Gell (1998) and Svašek (2007, 2012b), which were previously discussed in this section. However, he also draws interesting comparisons between his own take on 'things' – 'the humility', and power of 'things' to 'make people' (Miller, 2010: 53) – and Bourdieu's theory of practice. Equally, in the next quote, Miller (2010) insists on the central role of 'stuff' in making up and underpinning human life:

Bourdieu called the underlying unconscious order our habitus. There is nature, but culture gives us our second-nature, that which we habitually do without thought. Things, not mind you, individual things, but the whole system of things, with their internal order, make us the people we are. And they are exemplary in their humility, never really drawing attention to what we owe them... But the lesson of material culture is that the more we fail to notice them, the more powerful and determinant of us they turn out to be.

(Miller, 2010: 53-54)

In important ways, Miller's work (1987, 1998, 2001, 2008, 2010) celebrates materiality. The popular academic stances on material culture (mostly discussed in the previous section, 2.5.1), revolve around 'the idea that objects signify or represent us and that they are principally signs or symbols that stand for persons' (Miller, 2010: 10). Nevertheless, Miller (2010: 10) insists that 'in many respects stuff actually creates us in the first place', thus offering an innovative way of 'understanding of what it means to be human' (Miller, 2010: 11). In the end, Miller (2010: 156) is not ashamed of accepting his empathy 'to the things themselves', after all, things matter immensely to people – they organize people's lives, and even have the ability to comfort or discomfort them (Miller, 2008): 'Material culture matters because objects create subjects much more than the other way around...' (Miller, 2008: 287). In this sense, '[i]t is the order of relationship to objects and between objects that creates people through socialisation whom we then take to exemplify social categories, such as Catalan or Bengali, but also working class, male, or young' (Miller, 2008: 287).

Miller's statements proved to be valuable in the analysis of material culture narratives present in this thesis. For instance, I will demonstrate how materiality in fact created domestic routines and sites of intimacy for some of the participants in this research. Equally, I will discuss how objects also sustained (sexual and/or cultural) identities, as well as provided means of comfort and continuity in the midst of uncertainty due to constant mobility. In that sense, in chapter 4, section 4.2, I will illustrate how a yoghurt maker, a map, and a heavy book of Shakespeare's works, sustained migrant identities and offered transnational same-sex couples a sense of certainty and rootedness in their homes, hence illustrating the agency of objects, as well as their capacity to deliver relief and organisation to subjects. Similarly, in chapter 6, section 6.3, I explore how materiality not only leads in the creation of home and domestic identities, but also how it nurtures and

actively mentors and collaborates with the couples in the creation of their own relationships.

Finally, I close this conversation on material culture by exploring the capacity of 'mundane' objects to elicit emotions and memories in relation to 'the complex forms of subjectivity and feeling that emerge through geographical migration' (Conradson and McKay, 2007: 167; in Parrott, 2012: 41). In this sense, a study by Parrott (2012) examined the (uncontrolled) emotional effects of materiality: 'For instance, things intended to bring comfort... (Yet, they) provoked and affirmed feelings of loneliness and isolation' (Parrott, 2012: 50). Her study also illustrated Svašek's (2012b) idea of 'transformation', as she investigated how, in carrying portable objects which in some way sustain 'feelings of attachment to a homeland' (Parrott, 2012: 50) and particular traditions, migrants, and their 'stuff' are subject to transformation. New geographical contexts, atmospheres, identifications, and experiences re-articulate the dialectic between people and materiality, hence providing new changing meanings and emotive engagements between them over time and space.

Parrott's work (2012) resonated with some of the narratives explored in the empirical chapters. For example, in chapter 5 and 6, I will examine how material objects are not simply markers of identity or relationships between human beings, but how they also have the power to affect people emotionally. In this regard, I highlight the role of music, visual art (section 5.2.2.1) and food (section 6.3.3) in their capacity to produce sensory and deeply emotional moments for the participants. In the same subsection, I illustrate how the meanings and interactions around this materiality changes significantly over time. Likewise, in chapter 6, section 6.3.2.2, I provide a good example of the transformation, emotions, and unintended feelings of alienation that a set of decorative African masks evoke in one of the participants.

2.5.3 Gay and lesbian homes: domestic objects and spaces reconciling the self

Studies examining the experience of non-heterosexuals with home and family life are scarce. Papers by authors like Fortier (2003) and Gorman-Murray (2006, 2007) highlight how social research has often posited domestic life, family and home as sites of oppression for non-heterosexuals, therefore silencing their sexual identities and particular narratives. Moreover, Somerville (1992) and Dupuis and Thorns (1998) have found that the idea of 'home' has been conflated with the heterosexual nuclear family, marginalising significant number of individuals and intimate arrangements that fail to fit into this 'mould'. Not surprisingly, Bell (1991, in Gorman-Murray, 2007: 230) notes that 'housing is primarily designed, built, financed, and intended for nuclear families'.

The work of Gorman-Murray (2006, 2007 and 2008) aims to recover the importance of home, family and domestic spaces and materiality for gays, lesbians and other non-heterosexual individuals. Through a series of empirical studies, which included in-depth interviews and visits to people's homes, Gorman Murray (2006, 2007 and 2008) discovers how same-sex couples construct and maintain domestic life, how their homes become sites of affirmation (in terms of identity), reconciliation, protection, and the ultimate embodiment of the relationships with their partners and other loved ones. Indeed, gay men and lesbians 'ongoingly (re)make, (re)design and use their homes to consolidate their non-heterosexual identities and relationships' (Gorman-Murray, 2008: 290), and engage in home-making practices and accumulation of objects to 'sustain a holistic sense of self' (Gorman-Murray, 2008: 284).

Two important publications on queer home-making and domestic interiors were published in 2014. In *Queer domesticities*, Cook (2014) examined how queer men experienced, imagined, and effectively performed home and family life in 20th century London. Most importantly, the book investigates how broader public discourses (and laws) in relation to sexuality, family, and respectability, intertwined with these men's immediate pressing needs and realities in their homes, streets and communities; in this way, it showed the ways 'in which queer men originated a sense of themselves' while also problematising 'existing histories of home and family which almost entirely neglect queer lives' (Cook, 2014: 3). In all, Cook's (2014) book explores different and interesting facets of queer identity and intimate life in the past century, and in doing so, it reminded me of the substantial advances of LGBTQ rights during the latter half of the last century up to today. Interestingly, while Cook (2014) discusses the designs and 'beautiful' interiors owned by privileged middle-class queers, he also exposes the manifest homelessness and impoverished conditions that accompanied most of queer Britain due to their sexuality/'deviance'. Finally, I must also mention that I found the 'Taking Politics Home' chapter relevant to my study, as it intersected heavily with Gorman-Murray's (2006, 2007, 2008) research, as he regards the home as a site of identity formation, security, and politicisation.

In the same vein, Potvin (2014) presented a historical analysis of 'queer domesticities' from the 1880s to the late 1950s in Britain. Though the subjects in his research are all renowned personalities during those times, like Oscar Wilde or Noël Coward – 'astute collectors, men who sought to redefine the parameters of domestic life and fashion' (Potvin, 2014: 17), Potvin's (2014) study suggestively explored the aesthetics, cultural and political meanings in queer interiors at a time where queerness was illegal, both in public and in private. While acknowledging the fact that his case studies are far removed from the historical context of my thesis, this book, like Cook's (2014), does provide interesting material signalling the

importance of the physicality of the home for non-heterosexuals (in terms of identity-building), while also exposing the tensions between historical discourses on sexuality, domesticity, and family.

Ultimately, as Tucker (1994: 181) declares, home is 'closely connected to our personality' and even more so to a 'person's identity'. Furthermore, Tucker's (1994) paper suggests that the home elucidates a person's desire for eventual 'complete fulfilment', so for gay and lesbian couples, like the ones in this research, the home (when or if possible to establish) becomes a site of freedom to search and attain that 'ideal home where they would be fully fulfilled' (Tucker, 1994: 184).

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter offered a concise and comprehensive literature review of the main topics at stake in this research project. In summary, it examined the complex intersections and interactions of transnational migration with queerness, as well as with matters of home and (same-sex) intimacy. The last section also discussed material culture and its relationship with the social world, thus arguing for the relevance of materiality in the analysis of human mobility, emotions, sexual identities, and home and belonging. The next chapter, will now outline the methodological and epistemological approaches I followed in order to collect my data, and therefore, to construct the project as a whole.

3 An ethnographic approach for the study of transnational same-sex couples: reflections on knowledge making

3.1 Introduction

I met Umut and Julian on a cold but sunny October day in 2014; they were the first couple to be interviewed for this research. Unashamedly so, I can admit today my sense of nervousness at the time, and that questions like 'do I have everything I need for the interview?' or 'will I make a good impression?' were on-going. Their house was located in the heart of North East London. As I made my way there, I started to notice the manifest Turkish influence in the area - The barbershops, the food markets and the sudden whiffs of Turkish food coming from the kitchens of the local restaurants - and I wondered if that had, in any way, played a role in Umut and Julian's decision to live in the area. After all, Umut was born and raised in Istanbul, so in my mind, perhaps the presence of this 'Turkishness' in their neighbourhood was not a mere coincidence.

Eventually, when I finally met Umut and Julian and I had the chance to ask them about North East London and their reasons for choosing it as their place of residence, this is what they had to say³:

Umut: *I didn't know London at all so all areas were equal to me, but he wanted to live here...*

Julian: *There's much more going on, there's a big Turkish community up Kingsland Road here, and I kind of thought, you know what? The fact that Umut had failed to settle in New York, I thought to give it the best chance possible if we could*

³ I offer an in-depth discussion on how participants, like Julian and Umut, moved around different places and locations in search of sense of belonging in chapter 4, section 4.4, as I discuss 'Other migrations' and issues related to the concept of translocality.

go to the market and buy Turkish food... I don't think I was as naïve to think that he would mix with people from the community... It's a bit like, we've discussed it many times and I think I was even aware of it at that stage, if I had gone to Turkey I wouldn't have necessarily stayed with the English, British community in Istanbul... It doesn't necessarily follow that because they're from the same place as you that you're going to get on... But I knew that having that infrastructure, you know, having the grocery stores and things like that, that it would make a difference...

Umut: *It worked out really well... I didn't really mix with any of them (referring to the Turkish community in East London), it was great that it was there... To be honest, it took me a long time to discover that because we were always going that way (pointing in the opposite direction of where the Turkish markets were located) and it was my mum, actually, who came over and discovered that there were a lot of Turkish supermarkets and stuff in the area... But I liked it, that's why we came back here. After a year of living here we moved to South London, which we didn't like because I felt too detached from everything... Then we came back to this area after 3 years... It was great to feel that I was finally feeling at home.*

I opened this chapter on methodology with these initial 'fieldwork impressions' as they illustrate some of the 'operational' choices and reasoning behind this study. Although I had already decided to take an ethnographic approach for this research, this first experience certainly reassured me in my decision, as it proved the

importance of considering other methodological tools beyond interviewing, like observation and the analysis of material culture. Indeed, the sensorial and phenomenological perceptions arising from the smells, sounds and aesthetics on my way to Umut and Julian's house unquestionably added substantial information for my subsequent interviews with them. In other words, it taught me that there was more available data beyond the interview setting and that the considerations of 'stuff' like food, music and objects in general, provided interesting material worth exploring.

Hence, a significant part of this chapter is dedicated to explaining and outlining the ethnographic logic behind this project. In order to achieve that, however, I will start by explicitly analysing the epistemological standpoints that underpin this research. After that, I will focus on reflexivity and emotions, where I will explain how self-awareness and the acknowledgement of one's emotions, personal history and (social, economic, and cultural) positionality were important for the production of data. After that, in 3.4., the section titled 'Sample', will introduce the reader to the research participants and will also discuss issues in relation to participant recruitment, access and ethics. Then, in section 3.5, I will continue with a discussion on the ethnographic techniques employed in this study. As it has already been suggested, this included narrative coupled interviews, observation, and the construction of narratives around material culture at the physical home(s). As I go through each one of these 'items', I also intend to provide critical discussions behind these choices; one of my main aims in this thesis, for example, was to unsettle sociology's tendency to rely heavily on interviewing (Fletcher, 1989) and its disregard for mute data, such as material culture (Hodder, 2000). In this way, I will examine the importance of material culture narratives, participant observation, as well as the use of thematic and narrative analyses for the organisation and evaluation of the overall data produced during my fieldwork.

3.2 On epistemology: Integrating queer theory and feminism

3.2.1 Epistemological choices, introduced.

In this section, I explain how queer theory and feminism, together, shaped my epistemological position in this research. On the one hand, queer theory pushed the boundaries of my sociological imagination, thus, intellectually enabling me to challenge the genealogy and fixity of key concepts in this research, such as 'home' and 'family'. On the other hand, however, and as I will explain later in this section, several authors (Butler, 1993; Browne and Nash, 2010; Cooper, 2013; Green, 2007; Rooke, 2010; Seidman, 1996) have pointed out the strengths, difficulties and limitations regarding the use of queer theory as an epistemological standpoint. This partly explains why I also adhered to feminist tools and methodologies as the means to enhance my empirical and analytical undertakings. In other words, queer theory was central to expanding and challenging the theoretical and methodological boundaries of this project, whereas feminist practice was particularly helpful on the field as I understood and analysed the materiality and corporality of lived experience (Hines, 2007). In a way, queer theory delivered different theoretical 'provocations' and starting points for inquiry, while feminism provided necessary tools regarding methodology and the collection and analysis of empirical data.

Authors like Krane (2001) have asserted the methodological and analytical opportunities of bringing feminist and queer theories into conversation, as they support and even challenge each other. Similarly, Hammers & Brown (2004), and McLaughlin et al. (2012) claimed that the intersections between queer and feminist theory are manifest and that a productive dialogue between both scholarships can work to provide greater understanding on how gender and sexuality/material structures and identity are constantly interrelated at specific moments for particular political and social reasons. Moreover, on a more obvious note, it is important to

address the fact that some of the seminal and most notorious scholarship in queer studies was written by theorists who were initially formed and motivated by a feminist agenda: examples include Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), Sedgwick's *Epistemology of The Closet* (1990), and Rubin's paper 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality' (1984).

3.2.2 The scope of a queer epistemological approach

The difficulty in defining 'queer theory' lies at the core of this field's own radical poststructuralist agenda (Browne and Nash, 2010; Butler, 1993; Eng et al., 2005; Hines, 2007). According to Browne and Nash, 'what we mean by queer... is and should remain unclear, fluid and multiple' (Browne and Nash, 2010: 7). Similarly, Butler in her essay 'Critically Queer' (1993: 19), insisted on the need to keep the term 'queer' open to reinvention and redefinition, thus favouring 'historical reflections' and 'futural imaginings': 'If the term "queer" is to be a site of collective contestation', Butler argued, 'it will have to remain... in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes' (Butler, 1993: 19). As Eng et al. (2005: 3) asserted the openness and continuing self-critique of queer theory has always remained as one of 'the field's key theoretical and political promises'.

Scholars have continued to use a queer position 'to challenge conventional categories of sexual identity' while also recognising its 'transgressive potential of exploring identity negotiation' (Cooper, 2013: 91). In a similar way, Watson (2005) argued that the strength of queer theorisation lied in its application to intersectional and relational fields, and as a definite analytical basis for understanding the constitution of identities and the genealogy of ideas. Also, and concurring with these statements, Hammers and Brown (2004: 95) stated that the main goal behind queer theory is 'the debunking of the very notion of stability...

calling into question and problematizing all categorical thought'. This standpoint was particularly useful during the analytical development of this research, as I examined the complexities which lie at the intersection of sexuality, intimacy, migration and sense of belonging. Furthermore, it enabled me to problematize 'taken-for-granted' concepts such as 'family', 'domesticity', 'kinship', 'love' and 'home', and to explore how these terms, operated in the context of transnational migration and, more specifically, in cases where migrant same-sex couples were involved.

Over the years, the difficulty of coming to terms with precise and definite definitions of queer theory has opened spaces for criticism, particularly from the social sciences, and suitably, I started to wonder if it was sensible on my part to deal with queer theory at all. Kirsch (2000) for example, accused queer theorists for their inability to connect with real life problems, elitism, and 'reductionist deconstruction of texts interpreted only for personal use' (Kirsch, 2000: 115). Browne and Nash (2010: 1), on their part, presented a general concern regarding the approach and eventual data collection process: if, as it is argued by queer thinking, subjects and subjectivities are 'fluid, unstable and perpetually becoming', how would a data collecting process work? What is more, how would it be possible to opine and sustain any argument and epistemological viewpoint if such 'facts' (data) are only momentarily fixed and permanently changing?

In order to answer to this concern, I found in Seidman (1996) a possible solution, as he argued that approaching identities as unstable, porous and multiple, presented unique and productive possibilities for queer theorists. Although Seidman himself remains wary of queer theory's permanent 'refusal to name a subject' (Seidman, 1993: 132) and its 'strain of anti-identity politics' (Seidman, 1996: 12), he argued that in the end, the objective in queer thinking 'is not to abandon identity as a category of knowledge and politics but to render it permanently open and contestable as to its meaning and political role' (Seidman, 1996: 12). In fact,

this perspective allows queer theorists to focus their attention (in a Derridian and Foucauldian tradition) to the analysis of institutional discourses and practices that produce 'sexual knowledge and the ways they organize social life, attending in particular to the way these knowledges and social practices repress differences' (Seidman, 1996: 13).

Thinking 'through' queer theory, then, enabled a way of noticing and building on the absences of queer experience and knowledge. The 'queering' task in this regard consisted in thinking about ways to disrupt essentialist, heteronormative and fixed understandings of terms like 'home', 'family', friendship, 'transnational families', and 'intimacy'. In fact, queer theory may be at its most productive, and at its most relevant for this project (and to sociology, generally speaking), when it assesses how discourses and social practices organise society in terms of 'homosexualising' and/or 'heterosexualising' bodies, experiences, desires, relations, ideas, and acts (Green, 2007). In other words, queer theory's contribution and overall significance lies in its aim to analyse, and problematise, social dynamics and social classifications by 'laying bare the genealogy of a given discourse and its institutional, political and collective effects' (Green, 2007: 43).

In this way, this research project explores how terms like home and family, which are historically charged with heterosexual connotations, are construed and performed by queer migrant couples. Hence, this effort complicates not only the sexual assumptions behind these concepts, but also the stationary, sedentary expectations tied to them. Indeed, the research participants will discuss home and family as ever-changing and non-fixated terms, linking home for example, with their experiences and ideals around this term in relation to transnational migration, memory, and the future.

Finally, to close this discussion on 'queer theory', I want to make a reference to Ahmed's work on queer phenomenology (2006) as it was pivotal to my theoretical

and empirical approach to the interaction between people, spaces, and material culture. Her phenomenological stance also fits well with my engagement in this thesis with the notion of emotions (section 2.2.2 in the previous chapter), particularly in regard to the multi-sensorial and embodied experiences of emotion. Central to Ahmed's (2006) arguments is the concept of orientation, thus offering new ways of thinking about the spatialities of sexualities. Towards the beginning of her book, Ahmed (2006: 2) declared that '[i]t matters how we arrive at the places we do', thus bringing attention to intersectionality, and to reconsider how bodies are sexualised and 'how they take up time and space' as they interact with different bodies and objects. Broadly speaking, this pairing of queerness and phenomenology was useful in understanding how the transnational same-sex couples in the research were 'oriented' towards or by particular ideas (in terms of expectations of home and coupled relationships, for example), places and spaces (city/ countryside/ neighbourhoods/ houses/ flats/ rooms), objects (foods/ decorations/ mementoes), and memories. It is at the intersection of their lived experiences as non-heterosexuals and transnational migrants, particularly, that they come to inhabit certain material, identarian and political realities.

3.2.3 Feminist epistemology

Lastly, I would like to discuss the relevance of also incorporating a feminist perspective as an indispensable ontological and epistemological tool for my research. After all, while engaging with gender, feminists were among the first to challenge heteronormative assumptions about sexuality, mostly through Marxist, radical lesbian feminism, and the legacy of early first-wave feminism (McLaughlin et al., 2012). According to Merck et al (1998; in McLaughlin et al., 2012), there have been continuous 'fall outs' and tensions between feminist and queer scholars on different matters. However, McLaughlin et al. (2012) rightly pointed out that not only are the disputes between queer and feminist writers unfortunate, but also

detrimental. Ultimately, a 'feminist-queer alliance' will constructively involve processes of 'unravelling and revealing a reflexive and critical stance, praxis, experience, and the use of participatory methods' to finally see 'how identity is constructed and thus, how it can be de-constructed' (Hammers and Brown, 2004: 99-100). Equally, Ahmed (2006) asserted the impossibility of queer thought without feminism, as the latter was the first one to advocate for the awareness of intersectionality and the multidimensionality of identity. Furthermore, feminism's attention to lived experience, social ethics, and corporality (Ahmed, 2006; Haines, 2007), provided additional and useful tools 'on the field', as I explored the participants' narrative and material realities, as well as my own position within the research.

In this research, a feminist epistemological standpoint was pivotal in terms of the methodological choices made for the collection and study of the empirical data. The particular attention drawn to issues like reflexivity (further examined in section 3.3 in this chapter), or the constant aim for horizontal (non-hierarchical) research methods - i.e. active interviewing and the co-production of data with participants (explained in section 3.5.1.3 in this chapter) - were all underpinned by feminist thinking and practice.

Ultimately, I believe that both feminism and queer theory point towards the same direction: they do require quotidian rethinking and action, but more importantly, they are all about critically 'doing for and toward the future' (Muñoz, 2006: 1). In other words, feminist and queer theory strongly argue for the possibility and necessity of better worlds; a continuous 'insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world' (Muñoz, 2006: 1). Muñoz's (2006) considerations demand more dynamism and creativity in academia, and I hope that by exploring complex intersections between migration, sexuality, and intimacy through a variety of ethnographic techniques, I can prove my commitment in that regard.

3.3 Me, myself and I... & others: on the interplay between reflexivity and emotions

During the past three years, it has not been unusual for people to enquire on the why's and the how's of my thesis; in this sense, questions like "how did you get interested in this topic?" or "why do you focus on migrant same-sex couples only?" or even "did you come up with the project yourself?" were commonplace. Though these interrogations appear trivial and typical of the average eavesdropper, I took them rather seriously. After all, it is important to reflect on my own position within the study, and to understand my role in the process of knowledge-making. After all, Buscatto (2016: 138) argued that 'ethnographic researchers cannot be considered as protected from their theoretical or personal biases', while Davies (2008: 3) commented that 'all researchers are to some degree connected to, or part of, the object of their research'.

Moreover, Atkinson (1998: 9) argued that the narratives produced during fieldwork should be considered 'collaborations' and 'open-ended process[es]' between the researcher and the participants, while also keeping in mind that neither party is in absolute control of the data being generated. Therefore, an awareness of my overall role in the research development and outcomes is essential. This has often been referred to as reflexivity, or 'the self-aware analysis of the dynamics between researcher and participants, the critical capacity to make explicit the position assumed by the observer in the field, and the way in which the researcher's positioning impacts on the research process' (Gobo, 2008: 43).

Qualitative research literature puts reflexivity at the centrepiece of ethnographic-based research (Buscatto, 2016; Crang and Cook, 2007; Davies, 2008; Gobo, 2008; Pollner and Emerson, 2001; Whyte, 1955). When carrying out research, generally speaking, there is a tendency to assume that we are investigating something unknown to us, when, in fact, it is often true that 'we cannot research

something which we have no contact, from which we are completely isolated' (Davies, 2008: 3). In fact, this research project was inspired by my own personal life a few years ago. For 3 years, I experienced what it was like to be in a transnational and bi-national relationship; perhaps as in any other coupled relationship, I experienced moments of bliss, uncertainty, doubt and frustration. But as the relationship progressed, I had a constant feeling that the transnational, migratory and 'distant love' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2014) components somehow made my situation more challenging and frustrating, compared to what other less mobile coupled arrangements may normally practice or do. 'Waiting' was a particularly unbearable feeling, especially during the months where my partner and I experienced what it was like to be in a long-distance relationship: I had taken an internship in Mexico between my Master's Degree and my return to England for my PhD, and, during those 8 months, it felt like feelings of impatience and anxiety, plus the stress over visa applications, were the only things known to me. At the time, I kept going back to fiction and philosophy in what regularly felt as a pathetic attempt to find comfort in literature. Among those books, I happened to find Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* particularly poignant and appropriate, especially in regard to the issue of 'waiting':

The anxiety of waiting is not continuously violent; it has its matte moments; I am waiting and everything around my waiting is stricken with unreality: in this cafe. I look at the others who come in, chat, joke, read calmly: they are not waiting... The lover's fatal identity is precisely: I am the one who waits.

(Barthes, 2002 [1978]: 38, 40).

My own life and Barthes (2002 [1977]) fuelled my sociological imagination; I started to wonder how hypothetical others, who found themselves in a similar position to mine, were feeling: How did they cope (shall I say, survive?) periods of

long-distance love? Did they also see the ways in which migration and transnational intimacy exacerbated intimate/coupled challenges? And finally, was migration also informing as well as constantly disrupting their sense of 'home'?

Interestingly, the participants in this research were all at relatively mature stages in their relationships, and I mean that in relation to their level of commitment and sense of material security. Some were married, all (except Mateo and John) lived together, and their attachments to their relationships and physical 'homes' were evident. In retrospect, I wonder if the migratory experience and the constant feeling of uncertainty – unquestionably, the same I experienced – led them to value their relationships and their domestic spaces in ways that maybe other less mobile individuals and couples take for granted.

I also acknowledge how, not only my personal life, but also my position as 'the researcher', may have influenced my fieldwork. I noticed how participants often used words and language that were connected to the research, possibly in an attempt on their part to show engagement and familiarity with the concepts that I dealt with throughout my interactions with them. These situations reminded me that 'the interview does not represent the story of respondents' intimate lives, but rather a particular narrative of domestic life and relationships that is likely, at least to some extent, to be framed in the language that researcher brings to the interview... it is a narrative told in response to, and partly shaped by, the interviewer's agenda' (Heaphy et al., 1998: 461). Indeed, my research and my presence already dictated a certain reality, and a certain way to 'act' and communicate with my participants. For example, by referring to them as 'transnational same-sex couples', I was already imposing and activating certain kinds of thoughts and perspectives on my participants.

Finally, I would like to close this section with the following quote, as it captures the nature of the reflexive and emotional processes that I explained here:

Every living human being is a biographer from childhood, in that he perpetually studies the souls of those about him, detects with keen and curious thought the resemblances and differences between those souls and that still more present and puzzling entity, his own, and weighs with the most anxious care the bearing and effect of others' thoughts and actions upon his own life.

(Bradford, 1925: 14)

Though Bradford (1925) refers to biographical writing in this passage, I feel that his ideas can be extrapolated into my sociological work. As I described toward the beginning, this thesis was inspired by certain intimate and transnational circumstances experienced at one given time in my life. This eventually led me to enquire on the possible 'resemblances' and 'differences' that my perceived reality might have had with 'others' around me. But as I kept 'doing' this research, I also understood the impact of this intellectual enterprise upon myself; in other words, as I studied the participants' narratives, I realised that I was also studying (and reassessing) my own story.

3.4 Sample

This study consisted of a qualitative research sample of 12 transnational, and also binational, same-sex couples: 5 female and 7 male. It included individuals between ages 21-50. As stated in the introduction of this thesis (Chapter 1, section 1.2), while the term 'queer' being repeatedly used in the available literature on sexuality, queer theory, intimacy, and migration, I decided against using this word when referring to my participants. Instead, I preferred to use 'same-sex couples', or the sexual categories that participants themselves identified with – usually, gay,

lesbian or bisexual. Half of the couples that took part in the study were based in London, while the others were in different locations across the UK and 1 abroad: One in Scotland, another one in southern England, three in the East Midlands, and a final one in Iceland. Also, it is important to state that the participants in this study self-identified or positioned themselves as middle class and privileged, thus further intersecting my research with questions of class and privileged migration. 'Privileged', is nonetheless a relative term, as I would not necessarily align the research participants in the study with the highly mobile and 'wealthy transnational elite' that Sklair (2001) described in his empirical work. Instead, I use Conway and Leonard's (2014) use of 'privileged migrants' to argue that this is in fact a broad concept, which incorporates a wide range of spatial mobilities undertaken by a large number of individuals of diverse backgrounds. Likewise, I feel that Amit's (2011; in Conway and Leonard, 2014) portrayal of 'privileged migrants' appropriately describes the research participants in this study, as he argued that the migrations, and displacements are undertaken voluntarily by these relatively affluent, middle-class and largely professional people who possess the means to move abroad.

Participants were recruited initially through personal acquaintances and adverts placed on local LGBTQ publications in London and the East Midlands – the Camden LGBT Forum Newsletter and Nottinghamshire's Queer Bulletin (QB), specifically. After meeting the first couples, I followed a snowballing strategy as their own interest in my project led them to put me in contact with some of their friends.

All 'ethnographic encounters' were held at the participants' residence /physical home with both partners present. I was interested in 'coupled' interaction and interviewing, as it allowed me to analyse the coupled dynamics of narrative-making, emotional processes (as coupled intimate units), as well as the 'doings' of 'family displaying' (Finch, 2007). In this sense, I was aware of the performative processes at work, as participants behaved and talked in particular ways, not only

because of my presence, but also out of the fact that their partners were present too. Appropriately, I will get back to this issue when I discuss the interviewing processes and the performative aspects associated with it.

As previously mentioned, fieldwork was carried out at the participants' home(s). The reason for this was two-fold. Firstly, 'home', is, after all, one of the main topics in this research – and that includes the discussion of 'home' as a physical and identifiable place. Secondly, the construction of material culture narratives was based on the premise of studying a variety of objects and materiality at the 'home', as means to produce meaningful discussions on intimacy, identity, remembrance and belonging.

Though none of the research participants had reservations about me using their real names in my thesis, I decided against this, mainly because I am committed to protecting their privacy. However, I also felt that by anonymising their identities, I could enjoy a greater liberty in doing my analysis and writing. I agree with Ahlstedt (2016: 133) when she argues that 'academic writing is different from having one's relationship in a magazine, for example, exactly because one's story is not just re-told as one told it to the listener but critically examined and deconstructed'. In other words, I felt the need to 'fictionalise' my participants in order to detach myself from their own expectations concerning my research, and carry out the academic job I had set out to do.

With the purpose of introducing the reader to the research participants, refer to the tables below. I have included their names, age at the time of our interviews, country of birth, and current place of residence:

1 Umut and Julian

Name	Age	Country of origin	Current place
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			of residence
Umut	39	Turkey	London, UK
Julian	40	UK	London, UK

2 Sasha and Felipe

Name	Age	Country of origin	of Current place of residence
Sasha	23	Ukraine/Russia	London, UK
Felipe	21	Brazil	London, UK

3 Wojtek and Adam

Name	Age	Country of origin	of Current place of residence
Wojtek	35	Poland	London, UK
Adam	27	UK	London, UK

4 Federica and Emma

Name	Age	Country of origin	Current place of residence
Federica	30	Italy	London, UK
Emma	30	Finland	London, UK

5 Mateo and John

Name	Age	Country of origin	Current place of residence
Mateo	41	Colombia	London, UK
John	36	UK	London, UK

6 Ashlee and Helen

Name	Age	Country of origin	Current place of residence
Ashlee	28	USA	Aberdeenshire, UK
Helen	25	UK	Aberdeenshire, UK

7 Ken and Martin

Name	Age	Country of origin	Current place of residence
Ken	35	USA	Reykjavik, ICELAND
Martin	29	UK	Reykjavik, ICELAND

8 Arianna and Virginia

Name	Age	Country of origin	Current place of residence
Arianna	30	Italy	Bristol, UK
Virginia	32	UK	Bristol, UK

9 Giulia and Hanna

Name	Age	Country of origin	Current place of residence
Giulia	42	Italy	Narborough, Leicestershire,

			UK
Hanna	44	Finland	Narborough, Leicestershire, UK

10 Zach and Gil

Name	Age	Country of origin	Current place of residence
Zach	36	UK	London, UK
Gil	33	Israel	London, UK

11 Victoria and Gabriella

Name	Age	Country of origin	Current place of residence
Victoria	50	USA	Hemington, Derbyshire, UK
Gabriella	50	UK	Hemington, Derbyshire, UK

12 Anish and Anders

Name	Age	Country of birth	Current place of residence
Anish	39	India	Nottingham, UK
Anders	35	Norway	Nottingham, UK

3.5 An ethnographic approach

This study adopted an ethnographic approach for the collection of its empirical data. Hume and Mulcock (2004: xi) and Davies (2008: 77) conceive ethnography as a research strategy involving the application of various techniques for the collection of data on human beliefs, values, and practices. Early practices of ethnography assumed that long-term participant observation was enough to reduce the risk of distortion of facts, and to achieve a better sense of the context being studied. However, as Davies (2008: 81) argues, contemporary understandings of ethnography no longer believe in participation as the 'major data-gathering technique'. Instead, authors like Gobo argue that 'the pivotal cognitive mode of ethnography is observation' (Gobo, 2008: 5). Besides this, ethnography 'is served, in a secondary and ancillary manner, by other sources of information used by ethnographers in the field: informal conversations, individual or group interviews and documentary materials (diaries, letters, essays, organizational documents, newspapers, photographs and audiovisual aids)' (Gobo, 2008: 12).

Equally, reflexivity has been recently regarded as 'the fundamental base' of ethnography, and indeed, of social research methods overall (Adler and Adler, 1994: 389; in Angrosino, 2005: 729). Furthermore, there is an insistence on reflecting on the demands of specific studies and contexts, so in this sense, it makes sense to select methods and techniques that are most rewarding for the particular setting and subjects being studied (Davies, 2008). Reflexivity is therefore embraced throughout my research, especially considering that, in many ways, I share commonalities with the research participants (being gay, middle-class, and also having experienced transnational and bi-national relationships in the past). In relation to this, Gobo (2008: 12) argues that '[conducting] ethnographic research in cultures and societies to which the researcher belongs is particularly difficult because he or she is likely not to see (precisely because of their familiarity) the fundamental social structures on which that culture or society rests'.

To an extent, my ethnographic approach carries some elements of what Knoblauch (2005) has referred to as 'focused ethnography'. This concept is used to describe 'often practiced' forms of short-term ethnographies, in which data is collected 'in an intensive and rapid way' (Knoblauch, 2005). Although my fieldwork and data collection did not develop with the intensity and speed Knoblauch (2005) talks about, it could be argued that my research technique was non-continual, and perhaps not as long-term and 'in-depth' as conventional ethnography. All this, may lead some to state that my ethnographic approach was 'superficial'. However, as Knoblauch (2005) also argues, these misinterpreted 'weaknesses' are compensated by how data intensive they are. Indeed, each ethnographic encounter with the research participants produced large amounts of data captured by recording the interviews, taking photos of the material culture/spaces being discussed, and observation.

To clarify, the research setting for my ethnography was the physical home. I am concerned with attachments, matters of belonging, and ideas of 'home' 'here and

'there', and I found in the location participants identified as their physical home as a multi-sensorial and rich site for data collection to explore all of these issues and more. On the one hand, the choice for the 'home' as the place for carrying out my fieldwork was in clear connection with the research aims and questions of this project. On the other hand, practical reasons like access issues, funding, and time constraints were also central to my judgement on this. Although it may seem as the former 'limited' the possibility of more in-depth research, I found that the home, together with the various ethnographic techniques used for my study, produced data intensive material for subsequent analysis. By taking the physical home as a starting point – being there, observing it, discussing it – participants were able to explore intimate, emotional, and home-related issues in extent. The home stimulated the production of knowledge in ways that upheld the statement that 'memory and experience are social actions in themselves' (Atkinson and Coffey, 2011: 810).

In addition to this, I must also state that not all of the spaces within the home were studied during my fieldwork. To a great extent, access to the different spaces and rooms was controlled by the research participants. Though I repeatedly insisted on the ethnographic nature of my work, most of them used excuses such as 'messiness' and 'refurbishments' as excuses for not allowing me to see certain parts of their houses or flats. Interestingly, their bedrooms were usually one of those spaces I was not invited in. Only in one case (Umut and Julian) I was allowed to see and photograph the couple's bedroom, for instance.

Hence, in the end my research became an ethnography focusing on their living rooms, dining rooms, and kitchens. Perhaps, not by coincidence, my research was pushed into these, the social spaces of the home. To me, this indicated a high degree of privacy, and control that participants wanted to retain during their interaction with me. I hoped that as I engaged with them further I would be allowed to see more of their residences, but this did not materialise. Nevertheless,

as stated above, I consider my collected data to be rich and sufficient for the purposes of my thesis.

The limited access I had to the different spaces in the home, also suggested important and meaningful analytical links for me in relation to Finch's (2007) notion of displaying families (reviewed in chapter 2, section 2.3.3). Furthermore, I was able to reconsider the issue of display within processes of transnational migration, belonging and material culture, thus connecting it with the work of Boym (1998), McMillan (2006, 2009), Tolia-Kelly (2004a, 2004b), discussed in section 2.5.1.

In relation to this, it is important to state that 'the body' was also relatively absent in my study's data. The conscious reticence, or discretion, from most participants to discuss their physical intimacy, or bedrooms, was certainly surprising to me. Except for, perhaps, the holding of hands between partners during some of the interviews, or the hugs that I received from some of the participants at the end of our interviews, there was indeed very little for me to analyse in regard to the body, or bodily intimacy and emotions. That said, in chapter 6, sections 6.2.3 and 6.3.1 I provide some examples of the embodied reality of home-making; hence, how body, and physical closeness between partners enabled processes of homing (Ahmed et al., 2003; Boccagni, 2017; Brah, 1996) and domesticity.

In summary, the ethnographic approach for this study will comprise the following techniques: **narrative interviews, observation, and the construction of material culture narratives at the participants' home(s)**. Hopefully, the subsequent explanation of each of these components, along with an introductory section on reflexivity and emotions, will be sufficient to justify the methodological rationale of this study.

3.5.1 On interviews and performance

3.5.1.1 *Inviting a narrative to emerge*

Throughout my fieldwork, I followed a narrative approach for my interviews in order to capture the 'personal/biographical'. In doing so, I found the space to comment on the on-going conversations, and eventually, to also steer them toward purposeful directions. By this, I do not imply that I saw myself as the person in control of the narratives being discussed; rather, I always considered myself as a facilitator and collaborator – hence, enabling and informing the participants' storytelling. In a way, I continuously struggled to find a balance between a narrative approach and the necessity to converse or intervene during those moments when 'storytelling' was occurring. In the end, it was important to embrace the idea that 'ethnographic subjects construct narratives in a dialogic process with the interviewer' (Duncombe and Marsden, 1996: 150). After all, 'the interview is a negotiated text... a conversation...' that 'produces situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 642-43).

While I recognise the interactional and collaborative nature of ethnographic narrative interviews, Davies (2008: 81) identifies the importance of establishing a 'conversation in which the researcher still has particular questions or direction of inquiry in mind'. Moreover, it is important to always place special attention to how one communicates with the participants and to be aware of the meanings that interviewees place on their life experiences and circumstances, expressed in their own language, naturally – 'I want to know what you know *in the way that you know it*' (Spradley, 1979: 34, in Heyl, 2001: 369). Moreover, I need to point out that often the apparent 'off-topic' conversations with the interviewees produced

surprising amounts of valuable data, thus proving the significance of storytelling, with its unexpected turns and outcomes.

To a certain degree, it was comforting to find that these conflicts and tensions over 'non-intervention'/collaboration and unstructured approaches in interviewing are continuously debated and reassessed (Duncombe and Marsden, 1996). Bott (1957, in Duncombe and Marsden, 1996: 143), for instance, described how unstructured approaches initially left her respondents puzzled and 'suspicious' of what she was after, and it was not only after she began to ask more direct questions that she seemed to get a better response from her interviewees. Other researchers, however, are committed to less-direct interview approaches, and refer to their work as 'conversations with a purpose' (Weiss, 1975; Brannen, 1988; in Duncombe and Marsden, 1996: 143). Finally, based on their experience researching same-sex intimacies, Heaphy et al. (1998: 455) indicate that a 'methodology based on semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, can provide a way of exploring shifting nuances of identity by providing brief life-stories of the subjects', and allow for the development of narratives about intimacy, home and migration.

All this considered, the construction of narratives was my main objective. Indeed, my aim consisted in enabling participants to create their stories and I intervened as little as possible, commenting on specific subjects that I found interesting or relevant. Thus, I often 'invited' their narrative to emerge by starting our conversations with a simple question: 'how did you two meet?' And from there, the directions were often diverse and surprising, but always full of rich and lengthy amounts of data.

In practice, I held two separate and distinctive 'ethnographic encounters' with the research participants, which were largely based on coupled narrative interviews and observation:

The first interview was the starting point for triggering the narrative approach of this research and it usually lasted 2 hours or so. Participants mostly discussed how they met, their childhood years, their relationships with their places of origin and families, friends, living arrangements, practices and habits within the relationship, the transnational aspects of their family life (visits to the family abroad and communication with them through phone calls and ICTs like Skype), and about sensitive issues such as sexuality and the subject of 'coming out'. Because of the narrative aspect of the process, the interviews were rather interactive, with a fruitful exchange of opinions, experiences and emotions.

In preparation for the next interview, I asked participants to pick a variety of interesting or meaningful objects/materiality – even food. I also made it clear that it was important to choose 'stuff' that they could somehow connect with ideas of 'home', 'belonging', intimacy, family, migration and/or transnationalism.

The second interview consisted of narratives around the 'stuff'/ materiality they had chosen. I should clarify that this interview was always set up at the participants' convenience, and as it was the case, most participants preferred to do both interviews on the same day (usually on the weekends), regardless of the time that this would take. This was due to their schedules and availability. Often, participants had booked an entire day out of their lives to devote themselves to my research. Like the first interview, this one also lasted for 2 hours, on average. Instead of bringing the items to me, most participants chose to walk me through their house and to choose and talk about the materiality as we encountered it on our way. In regard to food, participants often took the opportunity to prepare their favourite dishes and talk about them as we were eating. Sharing meals frequently resulted in occasions for participants to get to know me and find commonalities; this was important as it created 'a sort of' intimacy and bonding between the three of us, allowing us to feel comfortable and build trust for the disclosure occurring during

interviewing. I will discuss these dinner invitations further in the 'participant observation' section in this chapter (section 3.5.3).

Before continuing, I would like to provide a justification for not extending my fieldwork beyond these two 'ethnographic encounters'. Following Davies (2008), I adopt a broad interpretation of ethnography as a research process encompassing qualitative techniques on fieldwork. Furthermore, partly because of time constraints, limited funding, and continued access negotiations with participants, I knew that there were significant limits to my research in terms of data collection, so in that sense, my ethnography is not a conventional one engaging 'in the lives of those being studied over an extended period of time' (Davies, 2008: 5). As I pointed out above, my encounters with each couple were limited to 2 days, and although authors like Walford (2009) have warned against the lack of rigour in recent ethnographic work, I stand by my role as an ethnographic researcher, and the quality of my ethnographic data. As Davies (2008) and Gobo (2008) insist, the quality, depth and richness of the observations and interactions with the participants is the essence and value of ethnography. In this sense, I also found Brockmann's (2011) reflections on short-term participant observation particularly meaningful and complementary to my approach, as he argued that in spite of possible compressed/constrained time periods in ethnographic work, the lived experience of those being studied can be successfully captured once researcher and participants have established commonalities and acknowledged each other as co-constructors of meaning.

The importance and value of my ethnographic work relies on the enormous insights provided by the 'situated conversations' and 'situated actions' (Brockmann, 2011) enabled by these 2-day ethnographic encounters that took place at the participants' homes. Indeed, in anticipation of potential constraints in achieving 'whole-life view' by means of extended participant observation, I chose the physical home as the site of my fieldwork. In the end, this location effectively enabled the co-production

of rich reflexive ethnographic data between the participants and myself. The time spent at 'the home', though apparently short, provided key insights into their coupled lives, identities, experiences, intimate lives (with friends and kin), and the complexities of attachment and belonging 'here' and 'there'.

3.5.1.2 On interviewing couples together

Researching same-sex couples naturally confronted me with the decision of interviewing couples together or apart. Eventually, I decided to go for the former, only. In what follows, I offer a comprehensive discussion of my reasoning behind this choice. Initially, I will discuss the importance of relationality and familial networks for this thesis, and how this heavily impacted on my interviewing technique. Then, I will move on to consider more practical issues, such as consent and trust, to finally finish by commenting on the strengths of coupled interviews and their overall relevance for my research.

Firstly, I would like to start by indicating that one of the main aims of this thesis was the need to position the research participants within wider social structures and narratives around them, particularly, the family. As I pointed out in section 2.2.5.3 of this thesis, though the queer migrant has gained more visibility and notoriety in migration research, there is still a tendency to construct his/her story away from familial networks or 'the home'. Given this, through coupled interviews, my research tries to reverse this epistemological inclination of portraying the gay and/or lesbian migrant as a lone traveller, and by doing so, it insists on these interview subjects as 'inherently relational selves' (Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014):

Taking a fully relational self as a starting point, one could argue that when co-production takes place between an interviewer and an interviewee in a real-life context, which

involves significant others from the informant's lifeworld, the stories presented are just as 'true' as the ones produced between interviewer and interviewee in an individual research interview context.

(Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014: 4)

The quote above supports the idea that coupled interviews are just as comprehensive and sufficient ('true') as individual ones are. In fact, the same authors also argue that 'joint reflection', brings out important 'nuances' in the data material (Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014). Participants in this research, for example, often complemented each other's 'memories', and also provided support for each other when discussing difficult topics, like feelings of alienation and unbelonging (Chapter 5, section 5.3.1.5) and grief (Chapter 5, section 5.3.1.4). By following this approach, I do not mean to underplay the individuality of the participants, or ignore the power relations existent in their relationships. In fact, I agree with Valentine (1999: 71) when she argues that '[o]ne advantage of separate interviews is that they give participants more freedom to express their own individual views than when interviewed jointly'. Equally, '[t]hey also allow more privacy for discussing other household members, (including the power dynamics between them), relationship secrets, and so on' (Valentine, 1999: 71). However, the same author points out that 'separate interviews can generate a lot of anxiety amongst couples' (Valentine, 1999: 71), and given the relatively short time I shared with them, I feared ethics, access and trust issues with the couples would be compromised.

That said, throughout the empirical chapters there are examples of individual narratives (coming out stories, for example, in section 5.3.1.1, chapter 5) and of power relations (owning and decorating the 'ideal home', for instance – sections 6.2.3 and 6.3.2, chapter 6) that took place during the interviews. In that sense, I wonder if researchers have underestimated the individuality that does exist, and that is constantly displayed, in coupled interviews. Moreover, '[w]hen couples are

interviewed together... conflicts can be debated there and then, and through that process, the researcher can be provided with interesting data' (Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014: 10). As Bjørnholt and Farstad (2014: 12) further argue,

[w]e cannot know whether these conflicts would have become apparent if these couples had been interviewed separately, but observing the way these conflicts unfolded as part of the exchange between the partners in these interviews gave us rich data that would have been difficult to obtain otherwise. One partner's immediate reaction to the other one's answers could be lost in an individual interview.

Reflexivity, as I stated in section 3.3 of this chapter, is a key component of my thesis. In that sense, the collaborative nature with participants, my personal circumstances, and the methodological choices for this study were ever present and not taken for granted. I wanted to contribute to the production of knowledge in regard to particular relationships and stories (in this case, transnational same-sex couples), while at the same time, being aware of the inherent complexities that do exist in coupled, shared lives. This, I believe, was also possible to examine through coupled interviewing.

Moreover, joint interviewing was revelatory when observing coupled dynamics. Through the verbal exchanges, for example, it was also possible to assess power relations within couples (who speaks about what, who speaks first and how often, etc.) and to notice how partners, together, make sense of their memories and coupled identities and experience.

On the practical side of things, pragmatic reasons regarding time and money also impacted on my decision to interview partners together. Bjørnholt and Farstad (2014: 14), in fact, believe 'practical aspects' such as these are relevant and deserve proper consideration:

This is not an irrelevant consideration... In many cases, it is easier to set up an interview in a couple's home if one can interview the partners together. Carrying out two extensive interviews one after another is time-consuming, both for the family and for the researcher.

As a PhD student, I faced financial and time-related constraints for the development of my fieldwork. Hence, I had to find the most data-productive, efficient and accessible interviewing approach for my ethnographic study. As it turned out, joint interviews provided rich, nuanced and complex data in line with the aims and questions of this research. As stated earlier, they even provided interesting observational information, which aided in the data analysis stage of my research, and also proved pivotal in illustrating the concept of 'displaying families' (Finch, 2007) (see section 2.3.3, chapter 2).

Similarly, my study did not encompass interviews, or interactions overall, with friends, relatives, or possible housemates. For my research, I was interested in the co-creation of knowledge with the couples only, aided with the different techniques I chose for the elicitation of data. In the end, the physical home, the materiality within it, and the acts of memory and interviewing, provided rich and sufficient data that effectively spoke to my research aims and questions.

3.5.1.3 Active interviewing

Holstein and Gubrium (1997; 2016) and Chase (2011) indicate how most empirical researchers have acknowledged the interactional nature of interviewing. However, they have also specified how influential interview guides out there still appear to be concerned with issues of reliability, validity, error, and the minimisation of bias

(See Riessman, 1993 and 2001; Silverman, 1993). In this rather restrictive perspective, interviews are treated as less dynamic; hence, interviewees are seen as the ultimate and only sources of the knowledge (data) generated within the conversation.

This is perhaps why I found the *active interviewing* approach discussed by Holstein and Gubrium (1997; 2016) so attractive, as it described the dynamism and collaborative facet that I wanted to achieve during my fieldwork. In this subsection, I proceed to discuss some of the basic ideas behind active interviewing.

Holstein and Gubrium (1997: 114) suggest treating 'interviewing as a social encounter in which knowledge is constructed', thus eventually recognising that the interview is 'not merely a neutral conduit or source of distortion, but is instead a site of, and occasion for, producing reportable knowledge itself'. Similarly, Hurdley (2006: 729-730) argues that '[t]he interview, as a confessional, a method of excavating narratives from the subject, is not an avenue to direct experience. It is an interaction, in which knowledge is contingent and co-constructed'. Interviewers and interviewees are permanently active, exchanging opinions and collaborating in the dialogic generation of meaning (Duncombe and Marsden, 1996). In summary, 'meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. Respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge – as they are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997: 114). In summary, 'the resulting narratives are interactional accomplishments, not communicatively neutral artefacts' interviewers' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2016: 68).

As a matter of fact, the instigation of certain kinds of stories from the respondents is one of the most important tasks that the interviewer has to engage with, and an essential part of active interviewing as a method. Accordingly, '[w]hile the

respondent actively constructs and assembles answers; he or she does not simply “break out” talking. Neither elaborate narratives nor one-word replies emerge without provocation. The active interviewer’s role is to incite respondents’ answers, virtually *activating narrative production*’ (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997: 123). By using the research project’s keywords and by even discussing my own motivation for committing myself to this study, I exploited different ways and devices at hand to engage participants with the vocabulary and the themes that I wanted to explore. Also, as I mentioned previously, I invited participants into the ‘realm of storytelling’ by simply asking them how they met. In a way, this allowed me to start every interview without imposing particular agendas or having any particular expectations – though with particular interests in mind, hence supporting Holstein and Gubrium’s (1997: 125) idea that ‘it is the active interviewer’s job to direct and harness the respondent’s constructive storytelling to the research task at hand’.

Finally, something must be said regarding the implications of analysis for active interviewing. Holstein and Gubrium (1997: 127) assert that ‘active interview data can be analysed to show the dynamic interrelatedness of the *whats* and the *hows*,’ and, how the participants’ responses can be ‘considered for the ways that they construct aspects of reality in collaboration with the interviewer’. In essence, ‘the challenge of framing the interview as a thoroughly active process is to carefully consider what is said in relation to how, where, when and by whom narratives are conveyed, and to what end’ (Holstein and Gubrium (2016: 79).

3.5.1.4 Interviewing and performance

Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell the truth.

Oscar Wilde (2003: 1142)

It doesn't take a sociology Ph. D. to recognize that we pretend every day.

Dan Fox (2016: 18)

The last subsection on 'interviews' is dedicated to the performative dynamics present in an interview context. Reflecting upon this is important, not only because it enhances the reflexivity aspect of empirical research, but also because it enhances one's understanding of the interactional dynamics that make the production of meaning, and relevant data possible (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997; Riessman, 2008). In this sense, Pool (1957: 193; in Holstein and Gubrium, 1997: 120) estimated that 'every interview is an interpersonal drama with a developing plot'. Additionally, he declared that 'the social milieu in which communication takes place (during interviews) modifies not only what a person dares to say but even what he thinks he chooses to say' (Pool, 1957: 192; in Holstein and Gubrium, 1997: 120).

Likewise, I found in psychoanalysis, specifically in Lacan's essay titled 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis' (2006 [1966]), reflections that, in a lot of ways, echoed my own experience while interviewing the research participants. In fact, just like Pool (1957; in Holstein and Gubrium, 1997), Lacan referred to 'the material' of his therapy sessions as 'drama' (Lacan, 2006 [1966]: 212), and highlighted the importance of speech and language as differentiated and central issues within this 1-to-1 setting. When discussing a particular experience with an analysand, for example, Lacan stated the following:

I would say that she verbalizes it, or... that she forces the event into the Word [le verbe] or, more precisely, into the epos by which she relates in the present the origins of her person. And she does this in a language that allows her

discourse to be understood by her contemporaries and that also presupposes their present discourse. Thus, it happens that the recitation of the epos may include a discourse of earlier days in its own archaic, even foreign tongue, or may even be carried out in the present with all the vivacity of an actor, but it is like indirect speech, isolated in quotation marks in the thread of a narrative, and, if the speech is performed, it is on a stage implying the presence not only of a chorus, but of spectators as well.

(Lacan, 2006 [1966]: 212)

Lacan's reflection could be linked to what I have discussed regarding language and interview environment as key elements that condition and affect the data produced in an interview. Indeed, words such as 'transnationalism', 'intimacy', 'home' and 'domestic' clearly set a particular tone in my interviews, and have, no doubt, influenced participants and their responses. This also highlights the collaborative aspect of the interviewing process, which was debated previously in this chapter (section 3.5.1.1).

Moreover, in the passage cited above, Lacan exposed the language interlocutors (the research participants) use is also interesting in at least another way: by giving individuals the opportunity, in the *present*, to talk about themselves and their experiences for a specific audience, the narration and representation of the *past* takes a unique form (Chase, 2011), in a way comparable to what could be described as 'method acting'. Thus, in order to deliver their message, and to make it relevant to the objectives of my research, participants 'say' and certainly 'express' things in specific ways; they aim to take me (the listener) back to 'those meaningful moments' in their past, and they do so by using particular words, or

exaggerating their body language. In this sense, the use of material culture narratives in my research were also useful, as it helped participants (and me) in further conveying and developing themes in their stories.

Similarly, in sociological theory, Goffman's (1963; 1969) conclusions on symbolic interaction and performativity draw attention to the dramaturgical aspect of the stories we tell, and, of the claims and impressions that we give of ourselves:

What talkers undertake to do is not to provide information to a recipient but to present dramas to an audience. Indeed, it seems that we spend more of our time not engaged in giving information but in giving shows

(Goffman, 1974: 108-109; in Riessman, 2008: 106)

In short, 'to emphasize the performative is not to suggest that identities are inauthentic... but only that identities are situated and accomplished with an audience in mind.' More specifically, this means that 'one can't be a "self" by oneself; rather, identities are constructed in "shows" that persuade. Performances are expressive, they are performances *for others*' (Riessman, 2008: 106).

The discussions on performance evoke important debates on what could be considered as 'truth' and/or 'pretence' in an interview. After all, Oscar Wilde (2003 [1891]: 1142) once famously argued that 'man is least himself when he talks in his own person', so one only had to 'give him a mask' for him to 'tell the truth'. On his part, Lacan (2006[1966]) argued that the interaction between listener and interlocutor is not on judgements of whether the statements were valid or not: 'It... represents us with the birth of truth in speech and thereby brings us up against the reality of what is neither true nor false' (Lacan, 2006 [1966]: 212). Thus, if interviews are indeed 'collaborations' (Atkinson, 1998), and if '[a]ll participants in an interview are implicated in making meaning' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997: 126), then what remains important is the value of that meaning-making process -

how that came about, and which topics were eventually considered and explored. In this regard, Polkinghorne (2007; in Chase, 2011: 424) affirmed that '[t]he researchers' primary aim is not to discover whether narrators' accounts are accurate reflections of actual events, but to understand the meanings people attach to those events... [N]arrators are selective in the meanings they narrate, and that context and audience (e.g., an interview situation) shape what meanings get expressed'.

Finally, I should bring attention to the fact that since I have interviewed partners together (never separately), this had a significant impact on the data stemming out of the interviews. Authors like Gabb (2008), Gabb and Fink (2015) and Heaphy et al. (2013) pointed out the dilemmas of interviewing partners together or apart. To a large extent, Finch's (2007) concept of 'displaying families' significantly informed my decision of only interviewing partners together (the discussion of this concept can be found in chapter 2, section 2.3.3). Also, since I was studying same-sex couples as units of analysis, I was curious about the creation of 'coupled narratives'; hence, how couples collaborated and negotiated their coupled 'version of the events'.

Indeed, often partners in a relationship not only conceal certain things from 'public life', but also from one another (Duncombe and Marsden, 1996; Valentine, 1999). A variety of topics like 'home-making', 'domesticity' and 'intimacy' were discussed with the participants, and it was therefore possible for them to accommodate their stories and be selective in terms of their disclosure about their 'coupled' lives and choices, especially knowing that their partners were next to them. In this way, participants often avoided talking about the 'bad' or the difficulties within their own relationships. This is when Finch's (2007) study becomes relevant in practice, as she pointed out the important role that personal narratives play in 'displaying' familial and intimate practices to particular audiences. Thus, not only were they 'performing' for me, but for their partners as well. In this sense, partners would

often gaze at each other before individually answering questions, as if making sure that their responses complied with the other's expectations.

Also, and possibly due (at least in part) to the 'performance' factor, I would like to point out the 'ordinariness' and perhaps, the traditional love and relational aspirations of all the couples in this research. Among these, I found stories of couples marrying or wishing to get married, accounts of them buying property together and/or finding an ideal physical home. In other words, of plans and challenges that perhaps are very much in line with other non-transnational, and perhaps, even heterosexual couples. This observation is similar to some of the conclusions that Heaphy et al. (2013) arrived at in their own study on same-sex marriages in the UK. In this regard, they argue that:

Such accounts highlight how in same-sex relationships, like heterosexual ones, women and men must actively grapple with conflicting demands, pressures and ideals, and juggle the expectations, tensions, contradictions, emotions, joys, disappointments, constraints and possibilities associated with partnerships. In these respects, all adult partnerships nowadays – same-sex and heterosexual, married and otherwise – share a degree of sameness.

(Heaphy et al., 2013: 7)

Evidently, context and class associations are important to consider here as well as in Heaphy et al.'s study (2013). As I have mentioned before, my participants are all ostensibly middle class and most of them all, except for one couple, resided in the UK. However, I would also like to argue that their mobility and transnational lives also played an important part; indeed, participants often felt the need to display important degrees of 'normality' in our interviews, as if they wanted to prove, somehow, that despite their mobile lives, they were still doing their best to practice

coupled life in the same way that 'others' would. Throughout my fieldwork, I felt that their plans to buy houses, cars, having pets or even children, were part of their need of displaying that necessity to conform to traditional ideas of coupledness and domesticity. Yearning for more stability, hence less mobility, was an on-going theme, which will be explored in chapter 4, section 4.2, as I discuss how participants negotiate their feelings of uncertainty as they migrate and lead transnational lives.

With this in mind, in the next subsection I will briefly examine the co-construction of material culture narratives at the participants' home(s). In principle, the focus during these interviews shifted from the interlocutor as the primary subject of research, to the material 'thing' being studied. While the interlocutor(s) are in a way still in possession of the story being told, he/she or they is/are in fact 'bringing the item to life', bestowing an identifiable and singular biography to this object, 'stuff'.

3.5.2 On the construction of material culture narratives at the participants' home(s)

A central part of this research entailed the examination and discussions around material culture and spaces within the participants' home(s). For the presentation of the material culture data in this thesis, I decided (with the participants' approval), to take photos of it. These images are featured throughout the entire thesis, as appropriate, instead of simply including them in an appendix. I consider that their inclusion in the data chapters adds analytical depth and a more active discussion of the narratives at stake. Furthermore, these photographs are key in upholding the ethnographic nature of this study.

The possibility of carrying out analyses of materials and objects in everyday social life has been widely discussed. In this sense, Fletcher (1989) pointed out that because verbal communication is so characteristic of contemporary human life, it has been the focus of dynamic and in-depth analyses. Largely because of this, 'the substantial role of non-verbal communication in daily life is not readily recognised' (Fletcher, 1989: 33). However, as Hodder (2000) argued, the potential inclusion of 'mute' data such as objects and other kinds of materiality enables the possibility of enhancing social research beyond its traditional contours.

Nevertheless, how can I interpret objects and domestic spaces at the home beyond what participants have to say about them? How can I observe an object or a particular space and let it reveal any data besides the one available through verbal interaction? After all, 'we cannot assume that we understand or recognize the roles the artefacts we purchase play in our lives, that quite often there are unrecognized functions played by artefacts and a multitude of different factors shaping (the) desire to choose and possess this or that artefact' (Berger, 2009: 63).

If the interest lies in understanding the meaningful role of objects within human life, the lessons of archaeological theory and practice may be significantly useful. Ultimately, 'if archaeology is anything, it is the study of material culture as a manifestation of structured symbolic practices meaningfully constituted and situated in relation to the social' (Tilley, 1994: 70). This relationship (that of materiality and humans), Tilley (1994) argues, is not a simple/obvious one: the correlation and association between material culture and society is complex. 'In order to understand material culture we have to think in terms that go beyond it... This means that we are thinking in terms of relationships between things, rather than simply in terms of the things themselves' (Tilley, 1994: 70). Therefore, we have to start considering the nature and content of the material, the visual and the tangible, the microrelations (e.g. design, craft work) and the macrorelations (e.g. the context and spatial relations) embedded in materiality.

In a similar way, Hodder (2000: 710) argued that 'the interpreter of material culture works between past and present or between different examples of material culture, making analogies between them'. Analysts are therefore confronted with a whole range of available evidence that can be patterned in unexpected ways. Hence, on the one hand, the consideration of the technology, function, and style behind a certain material, together with an acknowledgement of the spatial and temporal factors explaining it, can provide productive means for understanding the 'social and material implications of particular practices' (Hodder, 2000: 711).

Undoubtedly, when considering objects at the 'home' in my project, the choice of specific 'stuff' revealed a certain way to narrate and interpret past and present circumstances. However, unlike archaeologists, who must deal with material produced by humans long gone, I dealt with 'things' that are still being used, manipulated, and experienced (either by use or constant recollection) by their owners. Thus, the interpretation of material culture here consisted of an exchange between my own observations and the participants' voice. These components exposed the usefulness and meaningfulness of materiality, while also revealing its locus in relation to larger social and cultural structures (Tilley, 1994).

The construction of stories, of narratives around material culture at the participants' home(s) ended up being one of the main focuses of this research, and certainly, one of the most exciting, and valuable things about it. While the first session with my participants could be labelled as a 'standard' interview, the second part of our meeting shifted its attention from us three (though just on the surface), to the material culture at the home – from decorations, gifts, portraits, pieces of art, to food, mantelpieces, and music even. By stating this I do not mean to give more attention to this part of my ethnographic research than to the others; on the contrary, I merely argue that material culture narratives enriched the ethnographic nature of the project. Appropriately, 'it is important that the researcher not claim superiority for one or another technique "in itself" but rather consider how

effectively a given technique has been used and whether it is relevant for studying the given subject' (Buscatto, 2016: 147).

Very much in line with the meaning-making approach that I described when discussing active interviewing and narrative building (section 3.5.1.3), material culture narratives take 'meaning to be contingent and co-constructed by informant, researcher, and objects within their domestic setting' (Hurdley, 2006: 718). Furthermore, 'the practice of producing narratives around objects contributes to the personal work of autobiography and renders objects as meaningful participants in the social work of identity-building' (Hurdley, 2006: 718). In fact, Dittmar's (1992) psychological study on people's material possessions suggest that the meaning-making process between people, their homes, and material culture is always an active one, and that all three play an important role in such effort.

However, I have also gone beyond 'objects', and embraced spaces, food, and sounds (mantelpieces, radio, and music, to be precise) as part of a comprehensive study of material culture at the home. Pink (2004; in Hurdley, 2006: 730), for example, has 'called for methods of inquiry that engage with the "pluri-sensory" character of the home: the smells, sounds and tastes of home, as well as its seen, tangible and stories properties.' And in this sense, I agree with Hurdley (2006) in affirming that such enterprise enhances opportunities for fieldwork and theory building when it comes to researching the home.

The incorporation of material culture narratives to my research was very rewarding for me and for the research participants alike. I noticed that this is the part of our interview where they got the most excited about. In this regard, there were moments of bonding and humour between me and the participants, and this is something that perhaps traditional interviewing methods do not fully allow. Likewise, this was a chance for participants to 'dig' into their past and think about the material stuff that surrounded them and affected them – to acknowledge the

material component of their relationships, and to display and 'talk' about it with me. In turn, this was an opportunity for me to explore, with them, interesting associations between acts of display and meaning, or the mundane and the intimate. Essentially, as Woodward (2007) indicates, stories around material culture are not only interesting because of the objects that respondents choose to talk about, but because of the content of the talk in itself: 'The object is given meaning through the narrativisation of broader discourses of self, identity and biography, which link aesthetics to ethics of self, and social identity', and therefore, attention is not only given to the 'what (i.e. the actual object)', but also to 'the *why* and *how* (i.e. the narrative and performative accompaniment) of aesthetic judgement' (Woodward, 2007: 6).

In conclusion, narrative creation based on material culture was a creative and productive means to analyse intimate and family life mostly because it disrupts traditional sociological understandings of storytelling by inviting objects, and therefore, 'another type of data' into the picture. Narratives are ultimately 'stories which people tell to themselves and to others about their own family relationships' so as to 'enable them to be understood and situated as part of an accepted repertoire of what "family" means' (Finch, 2007: 78). Thus, narratives do not necessarily project what people really 'do', but rather act as vehicles through which people connect their own experiences with socially recognised modes of kinship and family. Hence, material culture narratives can prove to be new instrument through which we sociologically study human practices, identities, and attitudes.

3.5.3 Participant observation

In the framework of ethnography, Davies (2008: 83) stressed that 'the more important indication of good research is the nature, circumstances, and quality of

the observation', thus, the commitment to observe in a reflexive manner. As I already stressed in sections 3.3 and 3.5 of this chapter, a sense of reflexivity allowed me to carefully ponder my own position in relation to the context, the participants' stories, the emerging themes, and my degree of participation in the knowledge-making process. In this sense, I found Einarsdóttir's (2012) and Heaphy et al.'s (1998) papers particularly helpful, as they highlighted the importance of reflexivity when researching same-sex intimacies. Particularly, they focused on the centrality of the researcher's awareness of his/her own social, economic, and cultural position in relation to the research informants, thus warning of the challenges presented by one's own assumptions and epistemological standpoints.

It is important to emphasize that participant observation's role during fieldwork consisted mainly in supporting and refining data-collection throughout the process. In this way, observation was crucial for sharpening my insight and overall understanding into the participant's lived environments and surroundings. This chapter, for example, opened with my own description of Umut and Julian's neighbourhood, illustrating the relevance of my own sensorial experiences throughout the research. Likewise, once entering the participants' homes, I was able to take notice of their aesthetic choices, and the importance that materiality, and physical places had in their intimate lives. This, naturally informed my analyses and conclusions regarding how participants lived, remembered and dreamt of possible futures; in other words, how migration and transnational dynamics had left their imprint throughout their domestic spaces, and how intimacy and, at times, the 'cosiness' of their homes intertwined in complex and analytically fascinating ways.

The participation element in this research was dependant on the participants' willingness to let me interact more fully with them, but also, to my ability for finding and building trust and commonalities with them. Though Davies (2008) indicated the reduced attention bestowed on participation nowadays, I actively

tried to take part as much as I could. As I will discuss it in the data chapter of 'home' (section 6.3.3), interviewees often used food and drinks in order to make me, the researcher, feel welcomed and comfortable within their domestic spaces. Images 1 and 2 below, for example, illustrate two separate occasions where participants went out of their way to prepare a meal for me when I visited them for our interviews. Certainly, different factors influenced their decision to include a dinner invitation as part of our interview, but I would like to highlight four. Firstly, the fact that most of the interviews took place at the weekends (at their request, not mine) meant that participants were also including me in their weekend leisure activities, and this often included cooking. Secondly, the interviews were rather lengthy, thus it was reasonable for them to include a meal as part of their invitation to their home. Thirdly, and perhaps the most obvious one, is that I was, ultimately, interviewing these couples in their domestic setting, and as the literature suggests, home cooking is an essential part of domestic cultures, and understandings of politeness, warmth and intimacy (Hollows, 2008; Murcot, 1983; Warde, 1997). Finally, the meals provided a space where interviewees could shift the roles for a moment and become the interviewers themselves; thus, sitting and sharing food with the different couples turned into their opportunity to ask questions, and to find commonalities and build trust with me. Indeed, this dynamic was repeated with every single case study and, inadvertently, proved to be central to managing the power relation between researcher and those being 'researched'. Such is the power of food and the rituals around it – e.g. cooking and socialising; another example of the importance of materiality in social research, as I tried to convey in the previous section of this chapter (3.5.2).



Image 1: Dinner table; Ashlee and Helen



Image 2: Lunch; Giulia and Hanna

3.6 A thematic and narrative analysis

In regard to qualitative analytic methods, I decided to use narrative and thematic approaches for the study of my empirical data. On the one hand, a narrative analysis provides insight into the participants' interpretative world, thus highlighting the ways in which descriptions of events, background information, place, people, social position, and context interact and inform their stories. On the other hand, a thematic analysis, often characterised by its flexibility (Braun and

Clarke, 2006), captures the patterns and centrality of particular issues in relation to the project's research questions.

Section 3.5.1 of this chapter featured in-depth discussions on the dynamics and performative aspects of interviewing. A narrative analysis places particular importance on these characteristics, as it recognises the interview process as a 'communicative event', 'a performance', and an 'interactive co-production' (Cortazzi, 2001: 390). This is why, as I went through my final data – the recordings, transcripts and photos – I took 'all' of it into account when analysing it – the epiphanies, the silences, the laughs. In this way, I noticed how narratives evolved, how they fluctuated and were built up by the interruptions, comments and contributions made by participants and myself. Silences often signalled doubt, forgetfulness or reluctance, while lengthy conversations often signified interest and moments of intense remembrance. I, for example, recall a moment during my interview with Sasha and Felipe when we started talking about the relationships with their respective parents. While Sasha discussed this, Felipe kept walking back and forth in the room and even light up a cigarette and decided to smoke by the window, as if he had been trying to escape from the interview setting entirely. This event was recorded in the taping of my interview with them: I can hear Felipe's steps around the room and his eventual retreat towards the window.

In relation to thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006: 79) define it as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your set in (rich) detail'. Though widely used, particularly in connection to 'coding', Braun and Clarke (2006) recognise the flexibility and disagreement of how one should go about doing it. That said, their paper emphasised the naïveté in assuming that data simply 'emerged' from the methodological tools employed in a given research. In a way, this makes sense when connected with Holstein and Gubrium (1997; 2016) idea of 'active interviewing' as it brings attention to the active role played by all actors in the

study. On my part, I took an active role in identifying themes of analysis and selecting their contents. Fine (2002) argued, in this sense, that one simply does not 'give voice' to participants in social research; this process actually 'involves carving out unacknowledged pieces of narrative evidence that we select, edit, and deploy to border our arguments' (Fine, 2002: 218). Therefore, throughout this chapter, I have placed significant value on reflexivity, hence the acknowledgement of my positions, values and theoretical frameworks.

The themes of analysis were selected in direct connection to the questions and concepts that this research aimed to answer and discuss. Thus, transnational migration, intimate life and the concept of home were the three big themes. Often, the reader will notice that these themes, though identifiable in their respective chapters and literature, are not rigid in any way; different issues and discussions overlapped constantly, providing different angles and analytical perspectives.

3.7 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I discussed the epistemological and methodological approaches employed in this study. Here, I reviewed my reflexive and epistemological standpoints, my understanding and empirical engagement with interviewing (this construed as narrative, active and performative) and participant observation, as well as the inclusion of material culture for the production of data. I framed the connection and interaction among these different tools under ethnographic theory. Rather than placing too much importance on the time spent with the participants, I focused on the quality, circumstances and reflexivity applied throughout my fieldwork and analysis.

4 Transnational same-sex migration(s): movements across uncertainty, places and identities

4.1 Introduction

A study on transnational same-sex couples would not be complete without an in-depth analysis on migration and mobility. After all, the recent academic interest in transnationalism is strongly driven by contextual and unavoidable social developments during the last few years, such as large-scale migration and globalisation (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Vertovec, 2009). Moreover, the narratives of migration in this research enrich and expand traditional understandings of the concept, as they refuse a linear and/or straightforward logic in the journeying process that occurs during migration; as I will show, sometimes, the point of and reasons for departure are clearer, while the destination, may remain somewhat elusive, or simply unknown. Likewise, while the term 'transnational', as argued by Goulbourne et al. (2010: 5) implies the existence of this phenomenon 'within a world of nation-states', the focus on migration, broadly speaking, enhances the analytical possibilities in this study as I try to understand the lives of these couples beyond the transnational aspect of their migratory experience. Indeed, participants in this research moved not only from one country to another, but also across different places (regional migration, rural-urban, urban-urban, etc.), therefore starting important discussions on a whole range of matters in relation to mobility, translocality, local connections, and human geography. The data in this part will be instrumental in arguing that connections, spaces, and places at a local level, are key elements for a holistic and comprehensive understanding of migration and transnationalism.

That said, it is important to assert that the transnational experience does remain as a central aspect of this research. Specifically, I will highlight how some participants reflect on the journey from one country to another, their sense of insecurity and

geographical instability in that process, as well as the possible legal issues faced along the way. Likewise, I will critically engage here with the concept of 'transnational families', as employed by authors like Baldassar and Merla (2013), Bryceson and Vuorela (2002), Goulbourne et al. (2010), Skrbiš (2008), and Zontini (2009), in order to think of the ways in which non-heterosexual arrangements and experiences have not been included in the conceptualisation of this term. As my data reveals, transnational same-sex couples, like their heterosexual counterparts, also engage in practices associated with transnational care, network-building, construction of co-presence, and the recurrent need to make difficult emotional and practical decisions in order to find a balance between 'here' and 'there'.

Likewise, examining the singularity of non-heterosexual migration provides a good opportunity to reflect on how sexuality shaped the migratory experience of the same-sex couples in this research. Contributing to existent literature on queer migrations (Cant, 1997; Cantú, 2009; Fortier, 2003; Rouhani, 2015) I will argue that non-heterosexuality may have been a push factor for some of the participants, and moreover, that distance from the childhood home provided the space to develop their sexual identities and to also re-examine their close relationships with loved ones (kin and non-kin).

Lastly, this chapter will comment on the impact of mobility on the self and identities. Just as authors like Elliott and Urry (2010) have noted contemporary migration's effect on identities and selfhoods, I will dedicate a final section to a brief conversation on how migration has shaped transnational same-sex partners throughout their 'mobile' paths – their personal and coupled expectations, and even how they see themselves in comparison to 'others' who seem less mobile than them.

4.2 Destination unknown: dealing with uncertainty

The narratives about migration, as told by the transnational same-sex couples in this study, may be significantly emotional, as well as strategic when trying to comprehend the ways in which interviewees cope with what could be described as a sense of 'never-ending journeying' and insecurity. Hence, this first section will focus on the topic of uncertainty, as it appeared as an on-going and underlying mood/theme within the participant stories during my fieldwork. More specifically, I will explore through our interviews and material culture narratives how participants discussed and made sense of this topic. Thus, to illustrate the predominant arguments around uncertainty, I will be focusing on my interviews with two couples: Martin and Ken, and Federica and Emma.

I would like to start by discussing a homemade map (image 3) made by interviewees Ken and Martin, who first met each other three years prior to our interview. Martin was born and raised in Vermont in the U.S.A., while Ken was born in Wales and raised in Northern Ireland, UK. From what they told me, I gathered that they had chosen to be quite mobile from the beginning of their relationship, and this is partly explained by their individual stories prior to meeting. Ken, for example, had travelled around the world for about 7 years, and working, in his own words, 'just whenever' he 'needed to' as an English and French teacher. On his part, Martin had also done a good amount of travelling, but his journey was mostly dictated by his academic goals and lifestyle. As a couple, they lived in countries like Spain, the UK, and the U.S., and then recently, they moved to Reykjavik, in Iceland, as Martin decided to do his PhD there.



Image 3: Wall Map; Martin and Ken

Interestingly, the map in question is on display in their living room, and it stands as the most eye-catching decorative piece in their entire flat. The strategic position of the map (being displayed, after all, in the 'social room' within the flat), potentially suggests an attempt on their part to actively discuss that particular piece with 'outsiders' (such as visitors and friends), and therefore, to reflect on their individual and coupled mobile lives. Here is what Martin had to say about it:

Martin: *The map is sort of a mixture of our joined mobilities and separate mobilities throughout the years. So basically, it's also supposed to be kind of this work in progress obviously, that we can colour in as we go places... But I wanted to make a map that would show where we've been, where we've lived, so it could be sort of like a wall art... This came from a colouring book for kids, but each map was in a separate page,*

so obviously the scale is completely bonkers... Then we applied different colours: Basically, blue is places I've travelled, red is where Ken's travelled, green is where we've both been, and there are black outlines, that's where one of us has lived, and if it's coloured in black completely, that's where we've lived together. That's what the map is really about; it'll be really awkward if we get divorced... we'd have to find a different colour scheme for that (laughs)'. But yes, I think that that's actually pretty good, it's really significant as well as a visual display of the places we've been.

The map, and the narrative behind it reminded me of Arendt (2010 [1958]) as she argued that unlike any other human deed, storytelling had the power to effectively connect us with others in the public sphere. Similarly, Didion's (2006: 185) famous phrase – 'we tell ourselves stories in order to live' – proved to be relevant at this point, as it captures the importance of this map and what it represents for Ken and Martin. I argue that the map represents their necessity to communicate their own migratory experience to others, while also making sense of their mobile/migratory choices as individuals and as a couple. I agree with Jackson (2013: 17) when he argues that 'we tell stories as a way of transforming our sense of who we are, recovering a sense of ourselves as actors and agents in the face of experiences that make us feel insignificant, unrecognised or powerless'. After all, and as participants like Martin and Ken proved it, migrating, and in their case, constant 'moving around', can feel daunting at times. While they both have been privileged enough to exercise a good amount of agency when deciding the 'where' and the 'when' in relation to migration (their middle class belonging was openly acknowledged during our interview), the process has left them somewhat exhausted, and constantly wondering where they will end up next.

Such sense of unsettledness and uncertainty within the participants' narratives also resonates with Bauman's work (2000, 2003), as he argued that feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, uprootedness, and constant change are indeed typical features of today's daily life. In a world where everything seems to be less permanent and ever-shifting, and where 'holding to the ground is not that important if the ground can be reached and abandoned at whim' (Bauman, 2000: 13), the participants in this research were constantly caught up within their own wishes for stability and security, knowing that their transnational and mobile lives were taking them onto particular and rather uncertain paths. Thus, although storytelling may serve as an opportunity to gain a sense of agency and meaning within one's own recollection of past events, the narratives here also bear limitations, as it is not always possible to fully make sense of life choices, events, and outcomes. This is exemplified by moments of uncertainty and frustration present in the stories and interview extracts that follow.

Towards the end of our conversation about the map, for example, Ken recalled the importance of each place on it, but also started to feel a sense of discomfort as he went on about it. In a way, after living in different countries during the last few years, Ken and Martin feel a sense of instability and uncertainty when it comes to 'settling down'. This feeling resonates with Ahmed's (2000: 77) own reflections of home and migration, as she argued that 'there are too many homes to allow place to secure the roots or routes of one's destination'. For now, however, Martin's PhD programme in Reykjavik has provided them with a chance to at least think of Iceland as their current site of residence for the next 3 or 4 years, and that relieves them somewhat, though, not completely. Such temporary 'relief' was evident in at least two other items also displayed in their flat.

The first object was a framed map of the city of Ljubljana (Image 4). The initial reason of why they decided to bring this poster for the interview was because this was a gift that Ken had given Martin for one of his birthdays, but also because

Ljubljana had been the place where they first met. Yet, the most interesting part of the narrative, and the most relevant for the discussion here, came about when we started to discuss the large dimensions of the map, and how this purchase contradicted the buying patterns and very mobile lives that they two had led up to that point. In Ken's words:

Ken: *I think it's also significant because it was part of an exhibition in the centre of Reykjavik... Kind of expensive, like I would never spend that much money on a piece of paper, but there was something about it... As a symbol of, yes, okay, we don't know how long we will be in Iceland but it is home for now, and this kind of sentiment... Because since we've been together we've been in Spain, we were in Belfast, in San Francisco, and every time we were buying cheap crap because there is no point in like buying nice stuff... I wanted to buy something that it was, perhaps, nice... Yes, we're here temporarily, but I want to have, like, nice objects. Before I met Martin, I spent 10 years travelling and everything I had was in one bag, so just to have this... It's great.*

Later, as we carried on with this story, Martin spotted a big and heavy book of William Shakespeare's collected works in their bookshelf (Image 5), and seemed eager to include discuss it during our interview. However, it was Ken who jumped out of his seat to grab the book and to talk about it:

Ken: *I bought it in a second-hand bookshop. The works of William Shakespeare gathered in one volume. It was this thing, like, okay it's super heavy and it's really not very practical, but I just wanted to have it... start building some kind of... I don't know.*

Martin, then, tried to complete his idea by adding the following:

Martin: *Yea, even of starting a discussion of wanting to have a dog, have a bookshelf, works of art on... that we can put on a wall, that exist in a frame that's too large to fit to a suitcase... And I think these are sorts of things that we want but our lives have been so, so mobile during the last few years...*

Thus, the map of Ljubljana - being something big and expensive, together with the book - described by them as something heavy and 'impractical', both come to represent a sense of geographical stability, even if remaining in Iceland is still rather a big question mark in their heads. Nonetheless, the items are a testament of their temporary non-mobile lives, something that clearly gives them a sense of relief.



Image 4: Map of Ljubljana; Martin and Ken

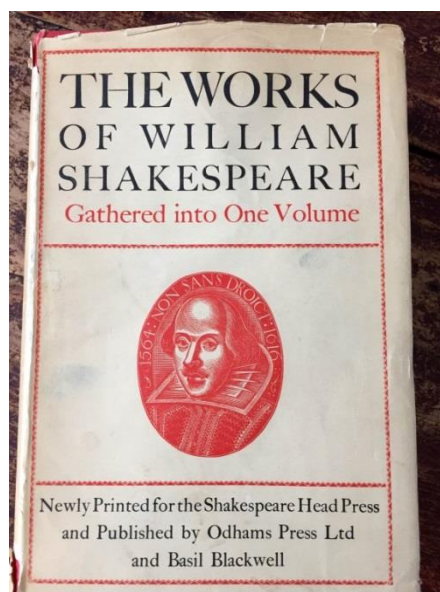


Image 5: Shakespeare Anthology; Martin and Ken

On a closing note regarding this interview, Martin and Ken’s story also made me reflect on the importance that physical spaces and ‘things’ acquire during migration. The aspiration to have ‘walls’ and art to hang on them (both, the wall map and the framed map of Ljubljana as examples of this), or the possibility of owning things that are ‘too large to fit to a suitcase’, as argued by Martin (the maps, and the Shakespeare book), illustrate the implications, and indeed, challenges of living embedded within the logics of migration and transnationalism. Equally, the objects addressed, thus far, also illustrate the agency of materiality in not only instigating particular emotions and memories, but also their capacity to provide a sense of rootedness, affirmation, and understanding in their identities as transnational same-sex couples. In this sense, these conclusions support the work of Gell (1998), Miller (1987, 2008, 2010), and Svašek (2007, 2012b), which I discussed thoroughly in chapter 2, section 2.5.2.

Interestingly, another couple in this study also reflected on the constant feelings of instability and ambiguity that constant migration evoked. Emma and Federica met as two young professionals and LGBT rights activists in Vilnius, Lithuania. Emma is,

both, British and Finnish, while Federica is an Italian national. They have been living in London for a little over a year – Emma working as a translator with a renowned publisher, and Federica working with feminist organisations and doing a postgraduate programme. During our interview, I got to ask them about moving and the journeying process, and when Emma and Federica started discussing the topic, quite unexpectedly, Emma decided to bring an object – a yoghurt maker (Image 6), that she argued, perfectly illustrated their feelings and thoughts on the issue.



Image 6: Yoghurt maker; Emma and Federica

***Emma:** This object here is a really important and central part of the household and the kitchen... It was a present that I got from Federica... Her mother had one of these machines so she decided to get me one; it's very integrated into my life and daily routines in the kitchen... It takes like 10 hours for the yoghurt, so you have to plan in advance, but it's not the most essential of kitchen items.*

Shortly after, Emma later argued that the machine was not simply another utensil in the kitchen, but also a marker of something rather interesting: stability; in her own words:

Emma: *(The yoghurt maker) It's also a mark of being more settled, that you're able to have non-essential kitchen things.*

To this, Federica added the following:

Federica: *If you're in a country for just a bit, you don't buy, you don't bring things, you try to live with what you really need... And not even an expensive frying pan because you would never bring it with you... You're never sure.*

Their realisation is important for this study, because it shows how materiality – the one that we interact with in everyday life – is able to capture and represent the flows, journeys and migratory paths of transnational same-sex partners; deciding to buy these types of objects (often more expensive, and non-essential), along with the routines and social interactions around them, as Emma commented, provide a sense of physical, psychological and emotional stability, hence, ontological security⁴. Evidently, they also contribute to the idealisation of stability and home (which will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 6, dedicated to the concept of home), as they provide material evidence of how these couples conceive and understand the meaning of 'settling down' together.

Likewise, the narratives around material culture here expose the ways in which participants not only try to recapture their own mobile stories through 'things', but also how they resist the uncertainty and hassle of their migrant and transnational lives by placing particular meanings on certain objects. This idea was similarly explored by scholars like Marcoux (2001: 69), who investigated 'what people bring with them when they move, what are the things that matter when the time to move comes, why they matter and how they come to matter' (Marcoux, 2001: 70). The research considered to the process of 'sorting out things' that people carry out before moving to a new place, and eventually argued that 'the things people move

⁴ Refer to my discussions on ontological security in regards to home and mobility in chapter 2, sections 2.4.1 and 2.5.1, respectively.

with them are at the heart of the constitution of a memory which often resists displacements' (Marcoux, 2001: 70). As it was explored in this section, transnational same-sex partners use objects with a dual purpose: as testaments of their mobility, and also as signifiers of longed stability. Hence, in a way, material culture provides them with the ontological security and the solid and physical evidence that, at least for the moment, a sense of non-mobility can be achieved, thus reducing feelings of anxiety and uncertainty.

4.3 Being together, on paper: marriage, 'right to stay', and migration

The previous section explored the feelings of uncertainty and physical insecurity conveyed by migration; as I went on to investigate, participants like Emma and Federica, or like Martin and Ken were, in a way, yearning for some sense of stability in the midst of their seemingly ever-mobile life. For these couples, however, migration and life 'here' and 'there', was not the only concern. Indeed, for couples that are not only same-sex but also binational, remaining physically together represented a challenge. As of July 2017, same-sex marriage is only available (nationwide or in certain jurisdictions) in 24 countries (The Telegraph, 2017), which adds to the already difficult task that these couples confront when deciding to 'be' and 'remain' together. Some participants, like Martin and Ken, anticipated 'migration issues' from the beginning, hence why they decided to plan accordingly and give themselves a sense of security and 'legality' by marrying:

***Martin:** We married in Vermont... In secret. We didn't tell anybody for about six months. Only nine months after we started dating, but the reason why we got married when we did was because we were anticipating migration issues in*

Ireland. We knew we needed to have some sort of legal document, and we were living in Spain at the time and my visa was going to expire there... Gay marriage has been legal in Vermont for some time, but at that time the Defence of Marriage Act (DoMA) was still in effect, so marriages were not recognised at the federal level, but I sort of thought that if we got married in the States, so that we would have that record of having actually gotten married there, in anticipation of DoMA being overturned at some point, which it then was... Like the next summer was. We did it secretively, it was kind of fun... At some point we still want to have a ceremony with friends and family that sort of ingrained this commitment to a larger community.

It has helped here (Iceland), I mean, it has some tax benefits for us... We're able to register, I changed my immigration status from being a student to being his spouse instead, which if by some sort of chance we decide that we love Iceland and want to stay, I could get citizenship after 5 years, which I couldn't do with a student visa.

Other participants like Ashlee (American) and Helen (British) also framed the marriage discussion around immigration, stability and legal security. Though love was at the centre of their decision, the imminent expiration of Ashlee's student visa in the UK accelerated their plans for a wedding.

Ashlee: *We say we got married, but obviously at that time it was 'civilly partnered'... So, our civil partnership ceremony was in June of 2012... It was a mix of many things I think. Christmas, 2011, we talked about long term and future stuff...*

And we did agree that we wanted to get married at some point, and obviously being in the UK on a student visa there are practical considerations to how you stay, where you want to stay. And obviously at that time there were a lot of changes as a result of the coalition government... Tories. Well, right around the time that I was going to be finishing they revoked post-study work visas so that took away an option for me to stay in the UK independently and figure out what I wanted to be doing. So, back to Christmas, 2011... It was like, when do you think you want to do that? And I was like, 'right now'... So, then we made the practical decision that it would actually make sense to do it before all the student stuff would wrap up, because then we wouldn't have the interruption of me having to go home, or have to work out who would sponsor who in order to stay on a visa...

Helen: *It was also partly what time of the year to do it... When our families would be able to do it... So, like, Ashlee's mum is a teacher, so the summer holidays were our window.*

Ashlee: *We basically said 6 months, and we set the date for July, and because they introduced new family immigration rules in like May, June time, we had to move to June... It was when they introduced the minimum income requirements and a few other things... That whole summer was high drama... You finished your degree... I was stressing out because I had to finish by the end of June... In June, we went to my grandparents' 60th wedding anniversary in Iowa... But before that, we had our civil partnership ceremony that we moved to the last possible minute in June... You (Helen) had a job*

interview in Aberdeen; I had already gotten a job up here, which is why we moved up here (Aberdeen), and you came back, and the next day we had our civil partnership... We went to Iowa... Then we came back to the UK and moved to Aberdeen... Went back to Wales and my dad helped us with the van and drove us all the way to Aberdeen... This is all in the space of like 6 weeks.

Thus, when planning their marriage, a vast number of issues were contemplated. Evidently, the legal side of things was the focus, but family-related matters were also of significance. The accounts here expose the complicated decision-making processes that Ashlee and Helen found themselves caught up in: trying to manage a rapidly changing and unreliable immigration system, while also pondering family availability across a transnational space. This exemplifies the reality lived by many transnational families: family members living separated from each other, yet, seeking for ways to feel close together (Baldassar, 2008), care for each other (Baldassar and Merla, 2013) and stay united (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002) despite the distance. Moreover, Ashlee and Helen's story also highlight the important role that family members play in decision making processes; I agree with authors like McLeod and Burrows (2014: 380) when they argue that 'the influences and impacts of family relationships, obligations, commitments and so on are perhaps more enduring and important than has hitherto been contended' in migration research.

In this sense, participants Victoria (American) and Gabriella (British), also discussed the initial frustration and sense of instability in their relationship due to the transnational nature of it. Though Victoria enjoyed material and economic stability back in the U.S., the fact that Gabriella had children, left them with fewer options in terms of where to settle, and this explains why Victoria eventually decided to move to the UK:

Gabriella: *At the beginning of August I went to the States for 2 weeks to see Victoria.*

Victoria: *And then I went in September over here, met the kids and came to the house... And then I came over again in November for about 10 days over Thanksgiving... And then in December for Christmas I flew her to Dallas to meet my family, and also to drop the bomb that I was moving to England, which I did the following February... I knew that it wasn't feasible for Gabriella and the kids to move to me, mainly because it sounded like a good idea to the kids – 'America, woo!'*

Gabriella: *I wanted to go!*

Victoria: *Little things like, the kids are very close to their father and he lives a mile up the road, and you know, what is that going to look like? So... by February 2009 I left my job... I would still be doing it; it was a brilliant job.*

Eventually, Victoria and Gabriella got married, and Victoria got her 'indefinite leave to remain' (ILR) permit (Image 7). She described the episode as a 'very emotional' one. In fact, my field notes assert this, as I write the following in regard to this specific interaction with them: 'Victoria shed a tear, or two, as she took out her ILR card; Gabriella looked out the window, as if trying to avoid eye contact with me – she was emotional too'. In Victoria's words:

Victoria: *This was a big deal, a big, big deal... Just finally, just relaxed. It was about stability for us.*



Image 7: ILR Card; Victoria and Gabriella

Also, the citizenship test that Victoria had to take played a major role in our conversation. While discussing the matter, they showed me the study guide Victoria used to prepare herself for it (Image 8) and we chose random questions during the interview and we quizzed each other. They briefly commented on how long, challenging and stressful the citizenship application process was, hence why they are grateful that the whole episode is out of the way now.

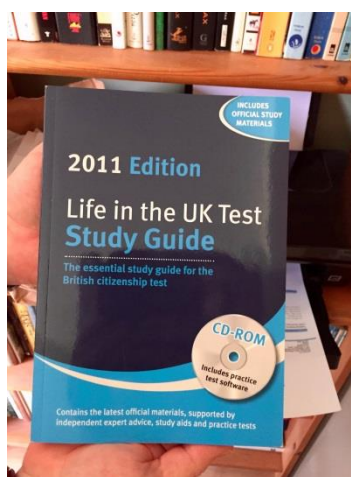


Image 8: Citizenship test study guide; Victoria and Gabriella

The accounts in this section reveal the emotional and legal hardship that transnational same-sex couples go through in order to be 'physically' together and attain a sense of stability. As shown here, some of them anticipated legal issues

and planned ahead so that they could remain in the same country. However, the decision of 'where' to live was often also problematical, as different circumstances and personal commitments also shaped and dictated their possibilities in that regard. I detailed, for example, how Gabriella's children and their wellbeing proved to be the biggest factor for Victoria and Gabriella, when they decided to move in together. Likewise, I discussed the legal strategies that couples like Martin and Ken, and Ashlee and Helen followed so they could stay together.

Indeed, these stories also speak to the literature on intimate and sexual citizenship, discussed in chapter 2, section 2.3.2. They narrate the ways in which transnational same-sex couples navigate citizenship, how they access institutional recognition and validation of their unions, and how they bridge the private and the public realms through legal means. Though academics like Richardson (1998, 2000) and Warner (1999) remained critical of the 'same-sex marriage agenda', the data in this chapter illustrate the importance of marriage for the research participants; certainly, marriage was a valuable and instrumental tool for guaranteeing the legal and material security of their relationships. In fact, 7 out of the 12 couples that participated in this research opted for marital unions.

While narratives on the process of migrating from one country to another, and achieving some sense of 'stability' after that process were recurrent in this study, I argue that a chapter on migration cannot overlook the 'other migrations' that transnational same-sex couples also take part in. These 'other migrations', include activities like moving from one city to another within the same country, or deciding to leave the city and moving to a rural area, or merely relocating from one neighbourhood to another. Hence, I now turn to some of these matters in the next section.

4.4 'Other migrations' & translocality

Moving from one region to another within one's own country, or experiencing migration within small distances are types of migration and mobility that scholars concerned with the current dynamics of globalisation and transnationalism rarely pay attention to (Bricknell and Datta, 2011), but I argue, are just as meaningful. In fact, this area has been more often explored by researchers in disciplines like human geographies (Bricknell and Datta, 2011; Perkins and Thorns, 2012, and Bonnerjee et al., 2012), and by social anthropologists like Appadurai (1995, 1996) and Hannerz (1998). Thus, I want to explore the progress of mobility, as it continues beyond the 'nation-state to nation-state' migration narrative, thus, assessing the significance of those 'local' and regional migrations, as they give way to other meaningful narratives in relation to migrant experience and practices after international migration has occurred. I will first turn to Wojtek's account, as he describes his experience as a newly arrived Polish gay immigrant in Manchester. Equally, I will discuss his journey from living in a 'rough' neighbourhood in Liverpool, to then ending up living in one of London's most emblematic and refined areas; his story, I will argue, reveals important issues in relation to place, identity and belonging.

Wojtek first arrived in the UK from Poland in December 2004. His first destination was Manchester, as one of his cousins lived there and he was his only contact in England. It is important to mention that at that point, his cousin was unaware of Wojtek's sexuality, and about the fact that his boyfriend at the time was planning to join him in the UK soon:

Wojtek: *The only person that I was able to locate was my cousin; we weren't really close but he let me stay in his flat for a month... He didn't know that my then boyfriend was*

joining me. I moved to England first... My boyfriend was selling all of our belongings, getting rid of the stuff, and basically planning... He had a ticket bought for a month later. So, I was secretly looking for a flat where we could stay.

The search for that place took Wojtek longer than he had originally anticipated. Though he found support from his cousin and other Polish immigrants, he never disclosed his sexuality to them. He did, however, reveal his homosexuality to prospective landlords, as he tried to be as honest as possible with them. Unfortunately, he told me that this sense of honesty had been the main problem during his flat hunting experience:

Wojtek: *I had lovely flats, lovely rooms being viewed but when I was open about the fact that well, it would be for a gay, same-sex relationship... They would say 'no, it's not going to work', things like that. So, there was prejudice against gay people... And literally, the night before my boyfriend arrived... I thought we would end up in a hostel, and I was actually contacting LGBT charities in case we couldn't find a place, because I knew we couldn't stay with my cousin and his housemates because they would've beat the shit out of us... Very homophobic... They didn't know.*

Finally, the night before his boyfriend arrived, he was able to find a room in a big house in the Salford area, in Greater Manchester. Cheng, a young Singaporean gay guy, who was described by Wojtek as 'very welcoming and helpful', happened to own the property. He remembers how they managed to build a strong friendship with him, and how that connection created a sense of home and 'connectedness'; they cooked together and even helped Cheng in running the house together. For Wojtek, ending up at Cheng's house was like a 'blessing', as he and his boyfriend

had achieved a sense of security and home away from his homophobic cousin and friends. I must mention that throughout our interview, Wojtek also insisted on his lack of interest in Poland, and the life he left behind there:

Wojtek: *Polish society is still very homogenous; one culture, one race... Full of social expectations; you can't really be flamboyant and crazy unless you are an artist on stage. So, I always thought of Poland as a country full of social expectations... You can't just do what you want.*

In a way, Wojtek's narrative, up to this point, captures the idea of 'postnational identities' (Appadurai, 1996) quite well, referring to how immigrants re-invent their lives and get used to their new surroundings in the host country, producing a 'new sense of locality' (Smith, 2011: 182) and freed from 'the linguistic imaginary of the nation state' (Appadurai, 1996: 166). Once away from the social pressures from Poland and from his cousin's homophobic inclinations, Wojtek found a household where he felt he belonged to, and where he could also express his sexuality freely. Then, through the years, he was also able to successfully pursue a career in social work, a career-path that he described as undervalued in Poland.

However, living in northern England brought other kinds of 'new' and unprecedented problems for Wojtek:

Wojtek: *There was a bit of a culture shock... Before moving here I used to be a bit of an LGBT activist with my boyfriend and my friends. We set up our first LGBT charity, which is still there, still working, mainly working with youth... I used to be in the middle of demonstrations facing neo-Nazis but I never got hurt, and then I was actually beaten up by neighbours in Salford as a gay man, and also for being foreigner... Most people were on benefits, were unemployed, got nothing to do*

except drink cider, and I was, first, foreign, second, I had a full-time job... They knew I was different. We were not connected with the community, we were easy targets. I couldn't eat properly after that because they pushed my teeth in a little bit, and the police response was not very professional.

Scholars like Ahmed (2000) have studied those 'encounters' between locals and 'aliens'/'strangers', and the modern challenges of multicultural societies, as they aim to embrace the idea of 'living with difference' (Ahmed, 2000: 95). Also, Cantú (2009), Benedicto (2008) and Manalansan (2004, 2006) bring up important considerations related to the modes in which queer migrants deal with new systems of power and exclusion in the new country, and with dominant and often illusory narratives of an 'imagined gay globality' (Benedicto, 2008: 317). Actually, migration is not merely a movement from oppression to liberation, but as Manalansan's (2004) investigation proposes, a constant struggle where the migrant experiences a set of restructured and new inequalities and opportunities.

Wojtek's account on this violent incident can also be read through a perspective that explores emotions as discourses and embodied experiences, which I examined in section 2.2.2.2, chapter 2. In this sense, I connect Ahmed's (2000) reflections on encounters between 'strangers' with the emotional and physical response that ensued in this episode. After all, Ahmed (2004: 4) also asserted that, when it comes to emotions, the most important thing to consider is not what emotions 'are', but what they 'do'. Negative perceptions and rhetoric against Polish migrants are commonplace in the UK (Taylor, 2016), and it is this kind of discourse that eventually push the politics of emotions to align 'subjects with some others and against others' (Ahmed, 2004: 117).

Given this, the physical aggression against Wojtek calls attention to the actual processes that arise from perception, sensation, and interpretation. Thus, I mean to speculate what the emotional/physical response to the presence of an 'othered' body in this particular scenario (that of a Polish gay man in a working-class neighbourhood in Manchester, in this case) would be. Hall (2010; in Svašek, 2012b: 11) argues that '[a]s people appear in' and interact with each other in specific social and material environments, 'their embodied dispositions are partly shaped by their discursive constructions of each other'. In a socio-political environment that persistently pits groups and communities against each other, it is not surprising that violence is often the response to 'strangeness' (Ahmed, 2000; Phelan, 2001).

Unsurprisingly, Wojtek refers to his chapter in northern England as a 'mixed pot' of experiences and as a 'roller coaster'. Sometime after that violent occurrence, he moved to Liverpool with his then partner to pursue a university degree and admitted falling 'in love' with the city, 'probably because it was by the sea with the seagulls, and the fresh air', he argued.

Finally, Wojtek got a job in the charity sector in London. There, he met many people and was able to develop his career in community and volunteering work. He then found a flat in Hampstead Heath through a queer organisation and undeniably, thinks that London 'has been very good' to him. In fact, I felt that Wojtek had a strong sense of belonging in the capital and the UK in general, and that his experience had also been enhanced by a sense of freedom unavailable to him in Poland; the possibilities for developing his career in the charity sector and interacting with people from other cultures is unparalleled.

Indeed, capital cities like London provide a variety of opportunities for relating and networking different. That is why choosing the 'right' place, or the 'right' neighbourhood can be challenging. Indeed, 'a new physical environment implies

new ways of interacting with people; it implies new kinds of behaviours, new modes of movements, and new kinds of corporeal experiences' (Brickell and Datta, 2011: 6). One of the other research participants, Julian, was quite aware of the difficult task of that finding the 'right' neighbourhood and community for him and his Turkish partner (Umut) to live in London. As Julian discusses the matter, I learned that his knowledge of Umut's 'failed' past experience living in New York informed his decision to live in that specific location, and also, that having a bit of 'Turkishness' near them was also important – markets, restaurants, shops – as that would provide a sort of 'framework' in terms of belonging and comfort for Umut:

***Julian:** When Umut and I started looking for our first flat together we put a deposit down for one in Aldgate, which is a really dead part of town, and then, an agent rung me up before we completed and signed the paperwork, and he said, "are you still looking? I've got this great one to show you..." So, I went down over and looked and it was too expensive for us but it was a beautiful flat. It was very near this Islington and Hackney area that I knew, and there was much more going on, there's a big Turkish community around.... The fact that Umut had failed to settle in New York, I thought to give it the best chance possible if we can go to the market and buy Turkish food... I don't think I was as naïve to think that he would mix with people from that community, we discussed it many times, and I think I was aware of that at that stage... But I knew that having that infrastructure, the grocery stores, and other things around... That would make a difference.*

In spite of Julian's careful arrangements, however, Umut felt very uncertain when it came to the idea of living in London and in the UK overall; not only was the weather undesirable, but he also found living there quite unaffordable:

Umut: *I was very hesitant to move here, so I said, maybe we will probably live in the UK for two years and then move to Spain or somewhere... warm... I mean, I didn't love it (London), but I liked it, it was obviously very interesting. You know, London is a fascinating place, so there's a lot going on, very multicultural, very international, so that I really enjoyed. I didn't like the fact that everything was really expensive and we were actually struggling to make things happen, but at the end of the day, I was happy to be with Julian.*

What is also interesting about Umut's words is that despite already settling down, the idea of moving again was still very much alive. In early 2017, I got in touch with them, and I learned that they are now living in Istanbul to be nearer to Umut's family and friends, and also, as his account above elicits, probably to enjoy warmer climate throughout the year.

Nonetheless, the city was not the only place where participants resided. Of the 12 couples in this study, 2 lived in a rural area and 1 lived in a semi-rural one. I provided a brief literature review on the politics and geographies of sexual identities in the countryside in chapter 2, section 2.2.3.

Certainly, participants like Victoria and Gabriella settled down in the country, and seemed to enjoy it immensely, partly because their financial position and life stage (both being 50 years old) allowed them to, but also because (as discussed in the previous section, 4.3) it was important for them to live relatively near to Gabriella's ex-husband so that her children could be close to their dad. Other interviewees like Ashlee and Helen, however, did not move to the rural area of Aberdeenshire entirely by choice. As I previously discussed it in the section 4.3 of this chapter, the pressures of staying together put them in the difficult position of 'rushing' into decisions and situations regarding different areas of their coupled life. While legally

they had to make sure that their marriage went through before Ashlee's student visa expired, they also had to somehow secure their economic stability by finding jobs anywhere in the UK.

The job hunt took them to Aberdeen, in Scotland. Unfortunately, they found Aberdeen 'boring' and full of 'close-minded' people. This fact, and their initial precarious finances contributed to their decision to move outside of the city:

Ashlee: *I hate Aberdeen, I can't stand it; It's a boring place, it's full of like Right Wing people that have never left or that are here because of the oil industry, sort of unabashedly like super Capitalist, who believe in the power of Shell... I can't stand it! It's really closed-minded – like, people are shocked when they see a black person walking down the street... They're even more shocked when they see like Lesbians, and they just don't get it.*

Her account is mostly interesting because it opposes traditional beliefs regarding most cities – as multicultural, liberal and tolerant places (Brickell and Datta, 2011; Perkins and Thorns, 2012). Naturally, this suggests that not all cities are the same; just as participants like Wojtek escaped the whiteness, cohesiveness and narrow-mindedness of Polish cities, Ashlee and Helen in a way ended up doing the same. In her opinion, the oil industry in Aberdeen has shaped people's social and cultural expectations and dynamics, and even helped defined 'otherness' in different ways from other urban areas in the UK.

Likewise, as in Wojtek's case with his landlord Cheng, Ashlee and Helen's was also non-heterosexual. On this occasion, the person in question was a lesbian woman called Carol. That initial commonality in terms of sexuality helped them to develop a substantial relationship with her, and it also helped them to feel more at ease with their new life in Scotland. Similarly, their situation narrates what migrating to

and living in a new place involves: the implication of being confronted by and embedded within new physical environments and socio-cultural behaviours (Brickell and Datta, 2011).

Ashlee: *Carol is really nice; she's quiet and she's very like, she's a serious person... She's kind of older than us, so I think she's got like a maternal side about us because we're like these two young lesbians that she's taking under her wing... She's just really lovely, she's nice, like, very hippie and into her organic thing, she's self-employed and runs her own massage therapy business.... And she's very 'eco' and grows vegetables and things like that.*

Helen: *I think she takes her lifestyle very seriously... She composts... Super eco everything, which you also want to do (looks at Ashlee). In fact, when we were looking at the house we were like 'oh, you compost!', and she was like 'ah, I can't believe you asked, that's awesome!', because people before us didn't compost at all.*

Finally, it is worth saying that though the rural has often been categorised as non-queer (Gray et al., 2016), Ashlee and Helen's experience attests the opposite. Recent literature on gay/lesbian politics of belonging and sexual geographies (Grey et al., 2012; Gorman-Murray et al., 2008) discuss this further, but suitably, I will examine this more in detail in chapter 6, section 6.3.2.1 dedicated to matters of home, belonging and ownership.

4.5 Left out: Are we a (transnational) family?

In chapter 2, section 2.2.5.3, I discussed the absence of 'the queer subject' in the literature on transnational families. In this space I will provide some of the most persuasive empirical data from my study showing how the transnational same-sex couples here engage in a number of everyday embodied, emotional and material experiences that would categorise them in what authors like Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) have defined and constituted as 'transnational family'. Certainly, transnational practices like the management of co-presence and distance, as well as care-giving and the creation of local familial networks are some of the key aspects discussed in the following paragraphs.

In one case, interviewees Federica and Emma expressed deep concerns and a sense of guilt about living far away from their parents. Emma's mother lives in a rural area in Finland, while Federica's parents live in Rome, and they often wonder how will they be able to manage their family obligations as their parents get older and require more care:

Emma: *Things will probably change when my parents become old... Now that my parents have separated... My mum lives alone in a quite rural place, and it's a worry for me all the time, feeling a guilt you know? Feeling that I should be nearer to the family.*

Federica: *I'm terrified, because they will get old... My brother is in Germany, he's finishing University, and he will go back to Italy now, but as soon as his Master's Degree is over he will look for a job somewhere else... His girlfriend is an architect already... But they will never be able to build a live together in Italy, so they will have to move... Emma's brother lives in the UK... If I move to Finland I can't bring my relatives with me*

because my mum doesn't want to go north, and Emma's mum doesn't want to leave Finland. So, we will have to find a way to take care of all of them... My grandma is 90 and my other grandma as well, but they are in the same city as their children, so my parents and my aunts and uncles are taking care of them. And I will not be able to do that, so we'll have to put them in a house or in some horrible place... How do you take care of them if you're not there? So, there is this kind of pressure being a migrant.

Certainly, caregiving at a distance is not an easy task (Baldassar, 2001; Baldassar and Merla, 2013; Baldock, 2000). As the account above reveals, it involves a continuous emotional experience defined by guilt, absence, longing and cultural duty. This, exposes the fact that transnational same-sex couples do not live and experience intimate life as isolated intimate units; their decisions, worries and plans are also shaped by familial expectations and a sense of responsibility towards their loved ones.

Furthermore, the ongoing sense of guilt, and expectations around transnational care-giving, are sustained and explained by what Svašek (2002, 2012a, 2012b) referred to as 'practices' and 'discourses' of emotions. As illustrated by Federica and Emma's interview, different cultures (like the Finnish and the Italian) hold particular expectations in relation to the care that sons and daughters should provide for their elderly parents. Emotional discourses, or 'discursive public forms', as Appadurai (1990; in Svašek, 2002: 11) called them, underpin power relations and emotional responses (like guilt) around this.

In other ways, being far away from the 'original' family has made Emma and Federica reassess the meaning of family and to build a family of their own locally with non-kin like close friends and housemates. This may suggest that migrants

may not even 'do' or understand family logics in the same way people who are less mobile would, and theoretically speaking, this also links with matters of translocality and the engagement with different local networks and communities (see section 2.2.3 in chapter 2 for more on this). Through time, non-kin may become as close and important as blood-relatives:

Federica: *It's kind of, you have to build your own network, and your family network again, kind of because you live so far away and isolated. You don't have anyone so you have to build it. I know my friend, for example, has the keys to my flat, etc. She's family; it's nice to be near her.*

Emma: *Adrian, our flatmate... We go to the local pub quiz every Monday... It feels like you're not living in anonymity.*

In spite of the importance of local 'family of choice' networks (Weston, 1998; Weeks et al., 2001), throughout my interviews I noticed that, comparatively, these couples still bestowed greater importance to their relationships with kin back in the homeland. This was true even in cases where participants had a difficult relationship with family members far away. I will be exploring these family-related issues more closely in the chapter dedicated to intimate life (See section 5.3.1 in chapter 5), but in the meantime, it is appropriate to briefly examine how participants experience emotions and co-presence with the left-behind family and significant others. Authors like Skrbiš (2008) conceptualise the experience of co-presence in transnational migration mainly through two processes: return migrant visits and transnational family reunions of some kind. In this sense, my interview with Giulia and Hanna is useful as it reveals how Giulia negotiated co-presence with the difficulties she was experiencing with her parents after coming out, particularly with her mother. Also, we see how her brother was instrumental in helping her to fix the strained relationship with her mother:

Giulia: *I came out to them 2 years ago... And my mum didn't take it well; she's kind of getting used to it now. They came to visit last week – it was very good. But I would say that after I came out there was a long period of not talking to each other... We'll see.*

Hanna: *I feel like we actually enjoyed each other's company, I took some time off work so I was available.*

Giulia: *I mean, my family really liked her before knowing we had a relationship... She came to Italy in 2012... We had been together for a few months and invited her over but I was not out to my parents.*

Hanna: *I think things started changing a little bit now... This Easter... Easter is very important to them. We went to Italy last Easter with my parents.*

Giulia: *Yea... My mum was not really talking to me much.*

Hanna: *And then we went to spend Christmas with my family and she was kind of blackmailing her... So, I guess that's when she started really thinking and realising that this is how it was going to be. And your brother has been playing a big role... She's very close to her brother, who likes me and we know each other. He's kind of trying to be like, 'mum, please, come on!'*

Giulia: *My brother, he's always been there for me... A hippie guy... A philosopher. He's always supported me. We had a discussion about me coming out a few years ago... I changed his mind... He took the consequences, he really had to care for*

my mum, my mum calling him all the time and crying, and being supportive.... You know? My dad has been really nice in this... I knew it wasn't problematic for him. My mum, she was the problem...

As in Giulia's case, other participants also engaged in other types of 'negotiations' with kin in order to sustain their family networks and closeness. In section 4.3 of this chapter, for instance, I discussed Victoria and Gabriella's particular situation regarding Gabriella's children. The kids' wellbeing was the main consideration (their education and their relationship with their father) as they were figuring out where to settle down together.

In regard to these 'negotiations', participants Anish and Anders also described how, whenever they visited Anish's parents in India, Anders had to be introduced as a 'good friend' of the family; indeed, disclosing their sexuality in India could potentially harm his parents' good social standing, so they go along with the awkward social situations they face there:

Anish: *Last time we went to India... Almost 4 years ago... We stayed with my parents, and Anders was introduced as a "good friend", and there were other family friends who would come to visit and then ask me about, "when are you going to get married? Shall we find a girl for you?" And Anders is there you know? I think it's something a lot of people know, but it's not something people would confront my parents with.*

It is true when authors like Skrbiš (208: 242) assert that 'transnational family relations take a lot of hard work, involve much emotional labour, and represent a specific social reality that deserves attention'. In this section, I have tried to advocate for a more explicit inclusion (or shall I say, mentioning? Naming?) of same-sex intimacies within the concept and academic work of transnational

families, hence providing persuasive evidence of their active involvement and embeddedness within logics of family life 'here' and 'there'. Their participation in family life despite separation and their sense of 'family-hood' (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002: 3) fully positions them within Baldassar et al's (2007: 13) definition of transnational family, which exposes 'the growing awareness that members of families' possess in order to 'retain their sense of collectivity and kinship in spite of being spread across multiple nations'.

4.6 Migration, selfhood, and identity development

Several scholars across sociology (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2014; Elliott and Urry, 2010; Vertovec, 2001), human geography (Gilmartin, 2008; Mitchell, 2007; Perkins and Thorns, 2012) and anthropology (Rapport and Dawson, 1998) have discussed the constitution of modern identities 'in a world where processes of globalization have made traditional conceptions of individuals as members of fixed and separate societies and cultures redundant' (Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 3). This assertion is important because, as authors like Brah (1996) argue, globalisation and modern migration have had a severe impact on how individuals conceive and interact with different places and identities.

Hence, in this section, I am interested in exploring how practices, circumstances and emotions across the participants' migratory and transnational experience has impacted on the ways they reflect on their identities and their choices so far. Participants Ken and Martin opened this chapter by discussing their very mobile lives through a map on their wall (section 4.2). Therefore, I consider it appropriate to use an extract of my interview with them once again, but this time, to analyse the way in which they made sense of their overall journey up to that point, and how they perceived their mobile lives in relation to others who have chosen to live a more fixed or sedentary life:

Ken: *I have often compared... I have some friends back in Belfast. They both grew up in Belfast; they both have their jobs there [and] love being there... They met a few years ago and now they're married... I mean, I'm sure they have their own challenges, but they're not having to ask some of these questions or are not trying to find a place... They have their community, they have their jobs, they have purpose... It makes sense for them to be there. But I think it is a challenge for us, and there's a lot of people in our situation: to find somewhere where you can both legally be, where there are opportunities, where there are, like, friends, or some sense of community... That's a lot to process and to ask for in a place.*

To this, his partner Martin added:

Martin: *I think the geography of it it's still up in the air because... We're both from these places that we talked about, Belfast and Vermont, but I still feel like, at this point, individually and before we ever met, like we moved so much anyway that our networks are kind of scattered everywhere, so sometimes home feels like it could be Iceland but sometimes it feels like home would have to be back where I was raised, but then other times it feels like it could be where my best friend is at this moment... It terrifies me. I want to find my way back to [home] but it requires a commitment to a community... It's hard to establish those connections with other people.*

Their feelings resonate greatly with what Brah (1996: 180) describes as a latent 'homing desire'⁵ and a permanent sense of duality and discontinuity. Indeed, we can note in Martin's account that the points of departure (Vermont and Belfast) are easily identifiable, however, the destination seems elusive. In this sense, Salih's (2003) asserts that transnational subjects are in the permanent search and 'need for territorialisation and secure identities' (Salih, 2003: 54), therefore emphasising the link between place and identity. And since Martin and Ken have experienced a lot of mobility, this presumably impacts on their identities as individuals and as a couple. Indeed, literature on transnationalism and human mobilities remind us that migrants, their selves, and identities, are continuously exposed and remade as they are exposed to different discourses, practices, and embodied experiences throughout their journeys (Svašek, 2012a).

Moreover, here Ken openly discusses the many issues that transnational same-sex couples must consider, as opposed to 'others': 'to find somewhere where you can both legally be, where there are opportunities, where there are, like, friends, or some sense of community', he argued. Surely, as evidenced in their dialogue, living a transnational and highly mobile life has influenced how they perceived themselves as a couple. Throughout the interview, I noticed that they kept bringing up issues around 'community' and 'friends', and how their sense of identity as a couple – being a transnational, binational, but also, highly mobile gay couple – was always used as a potential reason of why they were finding it so difficult to fit in in Reykjavik.

It is true, after all, that mobility and transnationalism 'reshapes the self – its everyday activities, interpersonal relations with others, as well as connections with the wider world' (Elliott and Urry, 2010: 3). And while Ken and Martin seem rather affected at this point when it comes to making sense of it all and interacting with

⁵ The concept of 'homing' is further explored in chapter 6, sections 6.2.3 and 6.3, as I analyse how participants idealise and perform the idea of home. Also, find a theoretical discussion on 'homing' in chapter 2, section 2.4.3.

others in Reykjavik, other couples like Anish and Anders reported alternative ways in which their own individuality and identity as a couple had been shaped by migration.

Actually, mobility has provided Anish and Anders the distance and space to develop their identities as individuals and as a couple. Though they both get along with their own families, the process of coming out and being openly gay in their presence has been an ongoing negotiation. Anish is originally from India and disclosing his homosexuality there could potentially compromise his family's social standing. In Anders' case, he attributes his parent's difficulty in coming to terms with his sexuality to the fact that they are from a conservative and rural community in Norway. And while they often must be prudent about the way they perform their sexual identities when visiting India or Norway, when Anish's parents visit them in the UK (where they currently reside), the story seems to be completely different:

Anish: *They do come to visit... Whenever they come here it's very different for them because they don't have to worry about community and what the neighbours will think, so I think they're a lot more relaxed. So, when they come here we have a really good time and they stay for a long time because we don't see them very often... We do lots of things together.*

Anders: *We also invite our friends and so they can see that we're happy.*

Anish: *Oh yes, last time they were here we just moved into this house and it was World Cup – my dad is really into sports, lots of World Cup matches, and lots of friends came over, and they could also see other same-sex couples that we know, so you know, kind of helped to kind of normalise same-sex*

relationships in a way, because they haven't been exposed to same-sex relationships at all in their environment... Coming here and getting introduced to lots of other people and seeing how straight people also interact with us... People with families interact with us. All of those things helped, provided an alternative narrative.

This dialogue is significant because it provides a good example of the multiple 'transnational' settings – referred to as 'transnational social fields' (Glick Schiller et al., 1992) or 'transnational social spaces' (Pries, 1999) that individuals like Anders and Anish inhabit. Indeed, when Anish's parents visit, their sexuality or their relationship, in general, does not pose a problem; however, the situation is profoundly different when Anish and Anders visit them in India. As indicated by Vertovec (2001: 578), 'large numbers of people now live in social worlds that are stretched between, or dually located in, physical places and communities in two or more nation-states'. These experiences and visits create the conditions for the 'construction, negotiation and reproduction of social identities... positioning individuals differently across each of their places of attachment or perceived belonging' (Vertovec, 2001: 578). Moreover, not only are they being constantly transformed by these experiences, but perhaps Anish's parents' ideas and convictions are potentially being challenged and transformed as well. Identity is, after all not solely a subjective thing, but also a vastly relational product of the self (Cantú, 2001), and when it comes to transnational connections, everyone involved, however 'mobile', is being influenced and impacted in terms of their values, attachments, affiliations, and identities.

To summarise, this section aimed to briefly discuss issues associated with identity, migration and transnationalism. Mainly, I have focused on the relationship between identity formation, negotiation and performance in association with particular spaces and places. According to the discussions featured here, migration and

transnationalism complicate identity, as it is influenced by and weaved out of different social networks, places, attachments, and cultural belongings and ideals.

4.7 Chapter summary

This chapter broadly explored the topic of migration. The migration narratives included were useful in understanding how transnational same-sex couples experienced and construed mobility and transnationalism. Throughout, I engaged with different themes, that I believe, problematise, and expand the way we think about migration and of those who experience it.

To begin with, I heavily focused on the intersection between migration and emotions, as I highlighted the substantial degrees of anxiety and uncertainty present in the daily life of these couples. Even when they seemed to be settled down (in terms of place, at least), a certain sense of uneasiness and apprehension toward the present and the future seemed to go along with their narratives. Also, and partly because of that uncertainty, I also commented on the difficulty that transnational same-sex couples have in determining and picturing a final destination in their journey.

Additionally, I critiqued the concept of 'transnational families', as I considered the term to be manifestly heterosexist, thus largely unconcerned with the lives of gay and lesbian intimate units. Furthermore, I examined other types of mobility and migration, like intra national migrations, or migrations from urban areas to the countryside, etc., and in the process, I argued that while these movements have been studied more heavily by scholars in human geography and anthropology, their relevance for sociology is also crucial. Firstly, because these mobilities and travels disrupt dominant narratives that only see migration as the journey from point A to point B, and that unashamedly ignore the continuous mobilities and shifts in place and space that keep occurring after that initial migration. Secondly, I argued that

these local migrations are also interesting because they are a good vehicle for the study of self-hood and belonging. In this sense, I explored how the individuals in this study accommodated, negotiated, performed and acquired new identities as they were 'on the move'. In the same vein, the chapter concluded precisely by reflecting on the links between identity development and migration.

5 Transnational intimate lives

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on how transnational same-sex couples construe and experience intimate life. The first part will look at inter-partner intimacy, while a second one will examine how these couples interact and sustain meaningful relationships with kin and non-kin locally and from a distance (“here” and “there”). Throughout, I also hope to engage in critical debates around the quality, as well as the challenges of intimate life. Though some Jamieson (2011) and Sanger and Taylor (2013) associate the field with ideas of care, respect, reciprocity, choice and closeness, I will argue, along with authors like Smart (2007), that intimate life, or as she calls it, personal life, is actually complex, difficult, unexpected and at times, disappointing. Therefore, I will stress the importance of considering the negotiations and dynamics that transnational same-sex couples are involved in with the purpose of managing on-going challenging relationships.

Additionally, the empirical analysis presented in this chapter takes a broader view on terms like ‘intimacy’ and ‘family’, understanding that the intimate life of these transnational same-sex couples is not only confined to them as couples, nor to their blood relations. Indeed, they do not lead their lives in isolation; as a matter of fact, the very nature of a transnational life often forces these couples to reach out to non-kin ‘others’, and into creating meaningful close bonds and relationships with them. As noted in the literature review chapter, theoretical understandings of ‘intimacy’ and ‘family’ are problematic, as they are typically associated with a narrow range of experiences and conditions (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1992; Layder, 2009). Likewise, the concept of ‘family’ usually alludes to ‘an image of degrees of biological relatedness combined with degrees of co-residence’ (Smart, 2007: 7), although ‘people relate meaningfully and significantly

to one another across distances, in different places and also when there is no pre-given genetic or even legal bond' (Smart, 2007: 7).

Notably, the transnational dimension of the coupled relationships in this research adds a significant layer of analysis by reframing traditional understandings of intimate life, thus, enquiring further on how distance, mobility and globalising trends affect and reshape practices of love, friendship and care. As Goulbourne et al. (2010) argue, the familial and intimate practices embedded in transnationalism raise interesting questions in relation to migration, relationships, boundary-crossing and intimate life in the contemporary world.

As already stated, the first section of this chapter is devoted to the examination of inter-partner intimacy. The section opens by examining different accounts of how some of the participants met, and how their dates and initial intimacy developed over time. While some of the partners in this research were able to date and get to know each other regularly, this was certainly not the case for other couples that experienced long distance dating and used Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), social media and phone calls as means to endure and build their relationships.

Equally, this section will also explore other types of interactions that were fundamental to the development of intimacy in these relationships. In this sense, listening to music, giving gifts to each other, or 'doing' politics together (like, discussing each other's political inclinations, or doing activism as a couple, for example) are some of the matters included in the discussions associated with inter-partner intimacy.

Subsequently, and moving away from the intimate dynamics between partners, the second part of this chapter will focus on the intimate life that transnational same-sex couples lead with 'others' – kin and non-kin. Firstly, the section will discuss the dynamics and practices carried out with blood relatives, from parents and siblings

to cousins and grandparents, in order to explore issues around power, cultural expectations, distance management, alienation, use of ICTs, and practices of care. Lastly, I will consider the different associations and relationships that these couples hold with friends and how those relations also play a crucial role in their personal lives.

5.2 Inter-partner intimacy

5.2.1 From 'love at a distance' to 'being physically together'

Wojtek and Adam met each other by using a dating website called *Gay Romeo*. After exchanging messages and links to songs and videos for two months, they eventually decided to meet. Adam, a professional dancer, was then involved in a successful production of a Rogers and Hammerstein musical, and had offered Wojtek a ticket to see the show in London. Wojtek, who dislikes musicals, remembers enjoying it. After the curtains went down, Adam met Wojtek and they had a few drinks at a pub nearby. While the play was on a short tour around the UK, their communication remained at long distance for a month or so, but after that, they were able to date and see each other frequently, as they both lived in London.

Similarly, Giulia and Hanna met in Birmingham during the LGBT Pride celebrations there in 2011; they drank, went 'bar hopping' and even experienced their first kiss that day. Giulia had recently broken up with a Belgian man she had been dating for a while, and Hanna was looking to find a new job 'hopefully out of the UK', she told me. Given the circumstances, at the time they were not really looking for a serious relationship, so despite liking each other, they did not remain in contact. However, one day, Hanna posted a message on Facebook asking if anyone had a bicycle she

could borrow or buy. Giulia responded to her message offering hers, and also invited her over for dinner that same evening. Since that day, they kept on seeing each other regularly, and eventually, decided to start dating. Hanna moved in with Giulia shortly after.

Arguably, the two stories above are quite typical in regard to dating. Two individuals who live in the same city meet up, share a good first day together, and then, over time, decide to date each other. However, this was not always the case with the participants in this research. Some of the individuals who took part did not meet their partners locally, or even in the same country where they resided; for this reason, the dating and intimate process came to be defined by geographical distance, mobile telephony, the Internet and mobility. I have chosen the stories of participants Julian and Umut, and of Victoria and Gabriella to illustrate this.

Julian and Umut both worked for a big company that had headquarters all over the world. Umut was based in Istanbul, while Julian was working in London. At some point, Julian was sent to Istanbul to lead an IT systems training session for staff members at that office, and Umut had been chosen as his main contact while being there. At first, they were unaware of each other's sexuality, but once they had the chance to talk about it openly, things started to develop rapidly:

Julian: *I remember him inviting me out for drinks with his friends that weekend.*

Umut: *I would've done that anyway... You do interact with people when they'd come over, so I just went and asked him if he wanted to go out. A friend of mine was a DJ and he worked in a bar around the corner... So, then we went there, I introduced him to my friends.*

Julian: *We kind of came out to each other because obviously we didn't know...*

Umut: *I had two friends there who were lesbians and started kissing each other, and then Julian figured out that they were gay... It wasn't a gay bar.*

Julian: *I didn't know that you were gay initially, but at least I worked out that, you know, it was fine... His friends were kissing, nobody was that bothered... I didn't have any concerns.*

Umut: *My ex-boyfriend called me while we were at the bar... And I told Julian that that was my ex-boyfriend on the phone. That was me coming out to him.*

After that night out, Julian and Umut went on their first date together. Umut labelled that evening as 'the beginning of the relationship' because that was the moment when they started to feel that 'it was going somewhere'. They also managed to spend some more time together before Julian's departure from Turkey:

Umut: *Well, we spent a weekend in our summer house (owned by Umut's family) because Julian was due to fly to Izmir to train the staff there, and I changed his flight without telling him. But he wanted to stay, I knew that... And it meant we could spend the weekend together... So, after that, he flew over to Izmir and then to other countries, and we hadn't seen each other for a while, but we were always on the phone. He was in South Africa and Sri Lanka, but we were on the phone a lot.*

Julian: ICQ.⁶

Umut: ICQ, yes... We did a lot of that until he came back.

Julian: It must've cost a fortune... Cell phone conversations... And we just kept in touch like that. And then I came back from Colombo... And I booked a 4-day long weekend to go back and see him, because it was my little window when I could go somewhere. So, Friday to Monday we spent together in Istanbul... It was the long weekend before Christmas.

Shortly after that visit, Umut went on a trip to London with his friends. Although the trip had been planned before he met Julian, he acknowledged his excitement at the prospect of meeting Julian again. This following excerpt of our interview is also interesting, because it introduced Umut to the concept and cultural rituals around Christmas, something that was, as he put it, an 'alien' notion to him. Also, despite the anxiety and challenges they faced to meet again, it is significant to notice how relatively easy it was for Umut to 'sort out' things in order to go back to the UK and settle down with Julian; this may have been in part, largely, thanks to the financial capital available to him:

Umut: We were going to come here (London) anyway with a lot of friends, but I was quite disappointed because I wanted to see Julian. So, I thought, 'maybe I shouldn't be here, maybe he doesn't want to come down'. But I didn't realise obviously around Christmas time that you had to spend it with family, because in Turkey, we don't have Christmas. That was sort of like an alien concept to me. I just didn't understand why he had to be with his family.

⁶ ICQ is an instant messaging client, and its name derives from the English phrase "I Seek You". It has fallen out of fashion in Western Europe and North America since the mid-2000s.

Julian: *I remember you flew on the 23rd and it was agony for me because I was up in Newcastle. My parents didn't know I was gay at that point, so I couldn't say 'oh I need to be back in London'... And they wanted me to stay through till New Year, but I made up an excuse and left on the 26th, Boxing Day, and I drove down in the afternoon to pick up Umut straight up and took him to the flat that I was renting at the time... He never went back*

Umut: *That's the thing; all of my friends went back... I called my boss and said, 'I'm not coming back'... I was going to study a Master's Degree, so I said 'O.K., I'll do that in London', and did go back to Turkey to apply for my Visa... I went back in late January and got my paperwork sorted out and I started university in February.*

Similarly, the story of Victoria and Gabriella brings interesting parallels and items of discussion in relation to long distance dating and relationship management, as well as on how online dating websites/applications have opened a whole new world of opportunities in terms of what some authors have described as 'virtual intimacies' (Wilding, 2006), 'virtual co-presence' (Baldassar, 2008; Urry, 2002), or 'love online' (Elliott and Urry, 2010). Actually, Victoria and Gabriella's story is so paradigmatic in regard to the latter point, that even meeting each other seemed to them like an act of 'fate'. When I asked them about how they had met, Victoria answered by asking me if I believed in fate, and assured me that I would believe in it after listening to their account.

Gabriella: *Victoria was living in Colorado and I was living here (UK), and I had just come out of a 7-year relationship with my previous partner, female... She walked out on me and*

the children. She just walked out, that was it... It was very difficult... I also lost my job straight after the separation... Everything was kind of downhill, and I was at home, unemployed, I was on Facebook, not ready for another relationship or anything... There was this application on Facebook which was free at the time... Which was called, 'Are You Interested?'... And how this application worked was that if you signed up to the application, everyday it would bring up a random set of people's profiles for you to look at. So maybe 10-15 profiles in a batch... And then you had three choices when you looked at their photo in their profile to say, 'yes, I'm interested and I'm going to let them know I'm interested,' or you could say, 'yes I'm interested but I'm going to do it anonymously'... Or the third option is to skip. So, this was a good thing... Because I was newly out of a relationship and it was fun... I wasn't looking for anybody but some of the people that came up, I mean, it was hilarious! Everyday my settings kept defaulting to the U.S., so I kept changing them back to the U.K. But every morning all these American women would come on again... All of a sudden, this profile picture came up... And I just thought, 'oh my Lord!' I saw that picture and I thought, 'oh yeah', I just did it anonymously...

Victoria: *She did it anonymously but what happened is that I had already clicked anonymously on hers, so when you do that it creates a match.*

Gabriella: *And it tells you, it brings up the other person's profile. So, from that day... It was June 2008... We started sending messages to each other on Facebook... Sending*

messages to each other backwards and forwards... Every now and again, I'd go on and she'd be online because there was a time difference... So, if we were online we would chat together... Talking about casual stuff, really.

Victoria: *It started just friendly, kind of chatting... I had a recent breakup... So, I wasn't looking for anything – pen pals, I was doing exactly the same thing that you were doing... It was entertaining... But her picture came up and there was something about her face, she just had a kind expression, she just looked like a good person... I was attracted but there was just something about it. You have a little bit of information, a little bit of a blurb, and sounded like she had a good sense of humour... Something about Monty Python... Music... So, yeah, I thought she sounded interesting. I clicked 'yes, anonymous', and then on my Birthday I get this message from her, and yea, happy birthday to me, so we started talking, then within a week or so we got on the phone and the minute I heard her voice I was like 'ah, accent!' We were on the phone for hours.*

Gabriella: *We were on the phone for eight hours that night.*

Victoria: *It was really expensive. Finally had to get on a calling plan.*

Gabriella: *And from that day onwards we talked to each other every day on the phone. That was the beginning July, and then... The 11th of August I went over to the States to visit Victoria.*

Victoria: *And then I went in September over here (UK), met the kids, came to the house, and then I came over again in November for about 10 days over Thanksgiving. And then in December I flew her over to Dallas to meet my family, also to drop the bomb that I was moving to England, which I did the following February... I knew by September that it wasn't feasible for Gabriella and the children to move to me, mainly because---- Little things like, the kids are really close to their father and he lives a mile up the road, and you know, what's that going to look like when they cannot go and see him? ... I left my job... But I knew when I came over here that I was going to train to do something else...*

Overall, the two stories presented above are mainly about the progress of long-distance courtship and dating between two individuals from different countries, of their initial encounters and traveling to see each other, and of their eventual decision to relocate in order to be together. As told here, the protagonists of these narratives left jobs, friends and family, and even possibly good-comfortable living standards behind for the sake of making things 'work'. Victoria for example, also told me how she left 'a brilliant job' that she would even still be doing in the U.S., but how moving to the U.K. translated into re-inventing her professional goals and prospects. Thus, for transnational same-sex couples, there are quite a number of difficult decisions to be made along the way, but as authors like King-O'Riain (2014) argue, long distance love and the 'sacrifices' that go a long with it, play a significant role in how people define and practice love today.

Furthermore, these stories also illustrate the fact that moving to another country or leaving family behind because of 'love' are highly dependent on the economic and social capital available to the individuals involved. Goulbourne et al. (2010) for example, strongly emphasise the utility of social capital for understanding the

major issues embedded in in the lives of transnational individuals, as this term conveys meaningful properties essential to those 'on the move', and who also maintain connections 'here' and 'there' – cultural values, identities, trust and reciprocity, and ideas of care towards the community and family of origin. As documented in this section, participants like Umut and Victoria were willing and able to take great financial, professional and social risks in order to be with their prospective partners; these sorts of decisions undeniably place them in a privileged position among other migrants. In section 3.4, chapter 3, I provided a brief discussion on the middle-class and privileged background that I associated with the transnational same-sex couples in this research.

Likewise, it is evident in both couples' stories that the use of a variety of ICTs (ICQ), social media (Facebook) and the phone were critical for the development of those relationships. To understand the choice of means of communication, I believe that is important to consider the age of the participants (Bowlby, 2011), but also, the technology available to them at the time. Notably, the use of phones seemed to be the preferred choice for both couples, but undoubtedly, other means played a key role in the dating process. On the one hand, phone calls might not have been always a reasonable option for Umut and Julian given the regularity of Julian's business trips, and on the other hand, without Facebook and its in-built applications, Gabriella and Victoria might have never met in the first place.

Nevertheless, the romantic tone that Gabriella and Victoria used to tell their story (interpreting it as a the product of 'fate') reminded me of what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2014) had to say about love and the internet – how love is largely something 'imagined', and how in the absence of the physical body, the use of internet exacerbates expectations and attitudes towards love:

Love used to be and still always is something imagined. As we all know, it takes place largely in the mind. What is special

about love on the Internet is that it takes place only in the mind. The Internet changes the overall nature of love... [It] makes it possible for lovers to love without being physically present... And it unleashes the imagination...

(Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2014: 46-47)

Love was, indeed, the centrepiece of this subsection; here, I aimed to present and discuss two narratives that not only illustrated practices of 'intimacy at-a-distance' (Elliott and Urry, 2010) and 'distant love' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2014), but also the love-based migration stories embedded in these accounts. As shown, travel and the use of a variety of means of communication (instant messaging technologies and social media) and devices (phones, computers, etc.) were critical to the development and management of these relationships.

5.2.2 'Getting to know you': explorations and practices of intimacy

In its early stages, getting to know someone is an exciting and romantic enterprise. Later on, as relationships mature, a higher degree of creativity and effort may be required to explore and nurture intimacy, and to confront different challenges along the way - small and thoughtful gestures, gifts, or even the act of buying property as a couple, become, at some point, part of the picture. However, love and intimacy are not necessarily straightforward things. Berlant (2000: 1) suggests that intimacy 'involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out a particular way'. For their part, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2014) argue that intimacy is a non-universal, highly porous and a fundamentally conflicting concept, especially when concerning people from different cultural backgrounds. Given these two definitions, one can only

imagine the complexity of the situation in relation to the same-sex couples in this study, as they happen to be transnational, and also mixed, in terms of nationality and culture.

Thus, continuing the discussion on inter-partner intimacy, I enquire on how transnational same-sex couples explore and engage in practices of love and intimacy over time. In the previous sub-section (5.2.1) I examined how some of the participants in this research performed acts of intimacy and love 'at-a-distance' (Elliott and Urry, 2010) – these included traveling back and forth, messaging each other using mobile and internet technologies, and of course, moving from one country to another in order to stay physically together. However, here I move on to explore the practices of intimacy enacted between transnational partners once their relationships ceased to be long distance. In this sense, it is relevant to mention that all the couples that I worked with lived in the same city/town, and 11 out of 12 already cohabited⁷. Indeed, as evidenced in the stories of Victoria and Gabriella and of Umut and Julian, being able to experience love and intimacy, without bearing the impracticalities and overall obstacles of long distance intimacy, was the main goal for these couples.

On a final note for this introduction, I must mention that my decision to only interview partners together may have restricted the possibility of acquiring more data in regards inter-partner intimacy⁸. However, in chapter 3, section 3.5.1.3 I also defended this choice by highlighting my interest in the concept of displaying families. Indeed, my thesis focuses on relationality, connections and the intimacy between same-sex partners with those 'others' around them (family members and friends, etc.), not on the participants as individuals. Additionally, the use of material culture narratives aided and promoted the development of very significant

⁷ As I indicated in chapter 3, section 3.4, John and Mateo were the only transnational partners to not cohabit.

⁸ See the discussion on the challenges and considerations of interviewing partners together or apart in chapter 3, section 3.5.1.4.

data that had not been possible to obtain through a traditional qualitative interview. In this sense, I provided an in depth discussion on this matter in the methodology chapter of this thesis (section 3.5.2).

5.2.2.1 Visual art and music

Art and music at the participants' home(s) were perfect vehicles for understanding the ways in which they showed interest in each other's culture, and personal biographies. Moreover, it was interesting to see how those artistic pieces (in the form of art displays, paintings, or ordinary music CDs) held a prominent role in their relationships and domestic spaces.

In my interview with Julian, he revealed how, one day, he went online with the purpose of finding 'a product' that would be able to reflect the connection between his and his partner's hometowns/homelands, Newcastle (UK) and Istanbul (Turkey), accordingly. Eventually, his online research led him to the work of Dion Archibald, who created a set of paintings based on a trip the artist made to Turkey. Instead of buying the painting he liked (titled 'Traffic', image 9 below), Julian decided to make a copy of it and hang it in their living room. Sometime after, Julian found another painting that depicted landscapes near Istanbul's international airport. This last painting was also copied by Julian and is also displayed in the living room (Image 10).



Image 9: Painting 1; Julian and Umut



Image 10: Painting 2; Julian and Umut

Interestingly, during our discussions about the paintings, his partner, Umut, reminded me that it was Julian (who is British), and not him, the one who kept decorating the house with Turkish 'stuff'. This is also evidenced by the Turkish numbers that Julian painted on the staircase which lead to their kitchen (see image 11, below). I see the staircase, along with the paintings above, as an important practice of intimacy; through these 'things', Julian expressed his curiosity and interest in Umut's cultural background, and that is noteworthy. Moreover, in my fieldnotes I noted the possibility of 'interpreting the materiality in Julian and Umut's house as demonstrative of multicultural and transnational domestic spaces'.



Image 11: Staircase; Julian and Umut

In all, these artistic undertakings turned Julian into a creator of 'meaningful décor' (Chevalier, 1999: 94). Indeed, his creations are no ordinary objects of display; they are not simply illustrations of Turkish culture, but also of the time and effort that Julian invested in their completion. Furthermore, the fact that his art is being exhibited in social locations in their house certainly raises questions in regard to the notion of 'displaying families' (Finch, 2007). In this sense, it is apparent through the paintings and the numbers on the staircase that Julian is displaying his intimacy with Umut.

Like Umut and Julian's case, participant Mateo copied a painting that reminded him of Colombia, hence, of his home country and the sceneries that he associated with his childhood (Image 12, below). The painting in question was 'El patio' ('The courtyard', in English), by Colombian painter Fernando Botero. Interestingly, Mateo not only 'reproduced' the painting; instead of staying true to the original painting, he altered a few things in it with the purpose of reflecting a more accurate version of his childhood home. In doing so, he changed some of the colour schemes, replaced the parrot in the original for a toucan, and added mountains to the background – '*my mountains*', as he jubilantly called them. The final product is

significant, as Mateo was able to successfully evocate his emotional attachments to Colombia in the piece. However, like in Parrott's study (2012), Mateo's painting demonstrated how art may, on its own, evoke emotional reactions from people, as it increases feelings of nostalgia and belonging, as well as a sense of mixed attachment and constant negotiation between the homeland and the new place of residence.

Eventually, Mateo gave the painting to John as a gift early in their relationship, and this is noteworthy for my study because, as I wrote in my fieldwork diary, 'Mateo's painting illustrated how participants use materiality to convey and express feelings, of love and/or sense of belonging, to their partners'. Equally, Mateo's painting is evocative of Berlant's (2000: 1) definition of intimacy (2000: 1), as she argued that this concept involved 'an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others'; after all, Mateo used the piece to communicate those memories and longings to his partner. As illustrated by this particular item and the story behind it, 'the practice of producing narratives around objects contributes to the personal work of autobiography and renders objects as meaningful participants in the social work of identity-building' (Hurdley, 2006: 718).



Image 12: Mateo's painting; Mateo and John

As previously mentioned in section 3.5.2 of chapter 3, music also became an effective vehicle for analysing 'doings' of intimacy between transnational same-sex partners. Thus, if considered a 'sort of' material culture, music can create sonic spaces that encourage and support intimacy. Moreover, it proves how music carries an important degree of agency in provoking emotional reactions and asserting individual and coupled identities, thus backing research by Parrott (2012) when she argued that migrants use and are constantly affected by material culture. For Mateo and John, music has created a certain binding, relational and exciting space, where they are both able to explore their own tastes, each other's cultures and even romantic inclinations. As an example of this, Mateo told me that he listened to *Rumba Estéreo* online every morning, a Colombian radio station that plays salsa and other tropical music. Over time, his partner John has learnt to embrace and enjoy this kind of music, to the point of both even discussing the 'overly dramatic' and 'passionate' qualities present in Latin American song lyrics.

This interview with Mateo and John reminded me of a piece by Tacchi (1998: 43) in which she explored 'the ways in which radio sound is used in the home' and how it 'provides many avenues for exploration'. Furthermore, Tacchi (1998) argued that music and radios should be considered as part of material culture studies, as they add 'textured environment (or material culture) within which everyday lives are lived, and social selves are created, re-created and modified' (Tacchi, 1998: 43). In this regard, she continues by commenting that:

Upon entering the home, radio sound becomes both material and social – it is social in its materiality. The relationships established between self and others are significant, and complementary, in a larger scheme of sociality, and they are present within real lives, not merely imagined... They are

made material, tactile even, through her creation of... textured, domestic soundscape... [Radio] stimulates the imagination, and imagination gives substance to sound. And sound can be seen to give substance, in its materiality, to relations between self and others.

(Tacchi, 1998: 43)

To this, I would add that radio and salsa music in Mateo's case, are prime examples of how objects and material culture in general, can be recognised as signifiers of lifestyle and identity (Clarke, 1998; Featherstone, 1991; Woodward, 2007), and, among other things, as key means to achieve recognition and ontological security (Noble, 2004). Mateo listens to this music because he enjoys feeling connected to Colombia (or rather, his idea of it) and because it gives him the energy and motivation that he needs to get on with his day. Moreover, I consider Mateo's morning routine with the radio as a very interesting one, because this repeated act, or iteration, creates a particular space, and mood, within his home – an intimate space that includes his partner, and in which they both explore and experience multifaceted aspects of personal intimacy and sense of belonging.

Other couples also mentioned music as centrepiece in their relationships. Towards the end of my interview with Arianna and Virginia for example, they went through their CD collection and showed me some of the CDs that meant the most to them. The CDs they put forward (images 13 and 14) were chosen because they had used them as devices to talk about their past, their teenage years and cultural backgrounds when they were initially dating:



Image 13: Arianna and Virginia's CDs #1; Arianna and Virginia



Image 14: Arianna and Virginia's CDs #2; Arianna and Virginia

Participants Zach and Gil also discussed how music had played a major role throughout their relationship, as it created moments of intense intimacy between them, while also allowing them to live and explore their Jewishness together. Klezmer music, particularly, held a special place in their relationship. Not only did they show me some of their favourite CDs, but, as my field notes reminded me, we also listened to some Klezmer music toward the end of our meeting, and this seemed to add a sense of joy and closeness to our interview (see some of the CDs below – image 15).

5.2.2.2 *The political (personal) is personal (political)*

Finally, regarding practices of inter-partner intimacy, I consider the issue of politics. Interestingly, this matter and the activist inclinations of some of the participants in this research became an important topic of discussion. While in my interviews I posed questions in terms of the transnational possibilities of their political allegiances and activism, I realised that in fact, the significance of politics for the participants had less to do with belonging and transnationalism, and more to do with inter-partner intimacy. As the following data shows, politics – talking about it, joining political parties, or doing activism together – enabled these couples to create an intimate, communicative and nurturing space within the relationship. Political talk, in particular, proved to be a good way in which participants could learn more about their partner’s moral and ethical values, as well as their commitment to larger social and economic issues.

Interestingly, my political conversation with participants Helen and Ashlee started with a discussion of Harry Potter. In fact, the first ‘meaningful’ object they could think of around their house was a Harry Potter book (see image 16). Their mutual interest in the book series has allowed them to bond and know more about each other’s identities and ‘geeky’ inclinations. At some point, they both went into explaining relevance of Harry Potter in their lives, and the possible political interpretations of the books:

Helen: *We have different opinions on like certain characters and certain story lines and we just have really good conversations about them... How people are treated... There’s a lot of repetition in the way that some characters behave...*

Ashlee: *We get into these very in-depth conversations.*

Helen: *Harry Potter is quite rich, so there's lots of things that you can take from it. You can talk about disability, and you can talk about queerness, and you can talk about race, and all that kind of thing.*

Ashlee: *I don't know, it's a fun hobby we have to explore all of those political things... I've always really enjoyed it... When we met, I was like, 'I'm a feminist, fuck off!'... You didn't think of yourself as a feminist...*

Helen: *Yeah, it really pissed me off when you'd be like 'do you think women should be paid the same amount of money for the same job?' and I was like, 'obviously!' and you were like, 'then you're a feminist!' and I was like, 'fuck off!', but yeah, now I'm really embarrassed about that.*

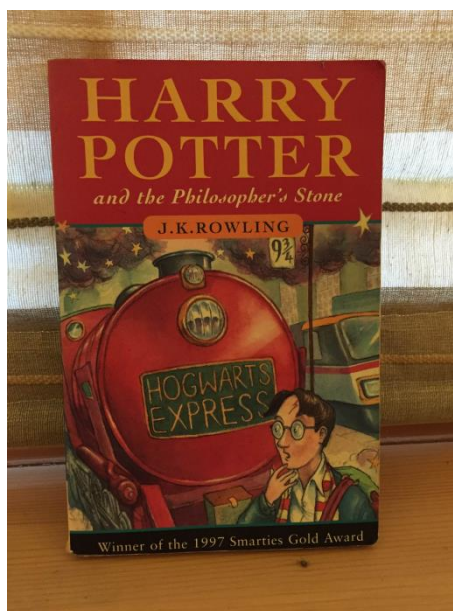


Image 16: Harry Potter book; Ashlee and Helen

Of the participant couples in this study, Federica and Emma were one of the most politically engaged. In fact, they participated in LGBTQ activist undertakings in Vilnius in 2013, and also told me how their politics had shaped much of their relationship: they both enjoyed going to political/academic talks, worked for LGBTQ charities, participated in political parties, were involved in online activism, and wore badges that represented their political stances.

Additionally, the topic of politics was literally 'materialised' in our interview through two objects that they showed me at their home: The first one was the official publication for Vilnius' Baltic Pride events in 2013 (Image 17), and the second one, was a 'pride' pin that Federica made for Emma some time ago (Image 18). In regard to the pin, Emma commented that she usually wore it, as she worked in an LGBT charity in the past, and that she enjoyed getting nice comments about it:

Emma: *'It looks nice and it also has the "rainbow" message... It's different, it's crafty... It's like a political message, but it's also soft and nice in a way that is not aggressive', she said.*



Image 17: Baltic Pride Publication; Federica and Emma



Image 18: Rainbow pin; Federica and Emma

Likewise, participants Arianna and Virginia were also strongly committed to political causes. They both attend feminist conferences and book launches regularly, and were Labour activists in the Bristol area (see image 19, which shows the badges and information cards they kept for this purpose). It should be mentioned that Arianna and Virginia had these items displayed on their mantelpiece, which reveals the prominent role that politics holds in their lives.



Image 19: Political memorabilia; Arianna and Virginia

Noticeably, the protagonists in this subsection on politics and political activism, were all female. Though two male couples (Anish and Anders, and Umut and Julian)

did mention politics, in some way or another, they appeared to lack the political enthusiasm and compromise that the lesbian couples in this study displayed. In fact, in my field notes I wrote something rather interesting in this regard:

I am interested in this pattern: all the lesbian couples in this research seem to be deeply committed to political activism of some sort – Labour, feminism, LGBTQ causes, veganism. Furthermore, it seems to me that politics is a strong bonding force in their relationships. I do not notice the same with the gay male couples in this study- they mention politics: 'oh, Tories are terrible', and so on, but they are not fierce activists, or as 'religiously' committed (politically speaking) as the lesbian couples seem to be.

In summary, this subsection aimed to investigate how transnational same-sex partners explored and performed 'intimacy' through different every day practices. I showed, particularly, how music, visual art, literature, and politics were used by the participants to create different channels of communication between each other, and explore their backgrounds, identities, and values.

5.3 Beyond the couple: intimate life with 'others'

While inter-partner intimacy was the focus of the first part of this chapter, I will now turn to examine the intimate and familial connections that same-sex migrant couples have with significant 'others', thus exploring the quality and management of their relationships with kin and non-kin. Studying practices and doings of intimacy beyond coupled life matters because as authors like Goulbourne et al. (2010), Smart and Shipman (2004), and Smart (2007) suggest, individuals, and in

this case, transnational same-sex couples, don't live in isolation; they're existence is 'relational, interconnected and embedded' (Goulbourne et al., 2010: 83) in complex networks full of obligations, commitments, and practices of care across time and geographical borders. The work of Spencer and Pahl (2006) is also pertinent to the analysis of the data presented in this chapter, as it considers the concept of friendship with kin and non-kin as a fundamental part of people's intimate life – they refer to these sets of significant others as 'personal communities', a term that like Smart's (2007) 'personal life', aims to capture the relational and complex nature of intimacy and family life.

In fact, throughout this chapter, I aim to capture that, precisely: the complexity of intimate life. Because of the experience of transnationalism, cultural diversity, and migration, the transnational same-sex couples in this study find themselves constantly negotiating different connections and emotional investments over time and distance. As I will illustrate it, there are positive and negative sides to that; I will start by describing how participant couples experience, sustain, and negotiate their relationships over time, and across different geographies with kin, and finally, I will close by examining the topic of friendship – their relationships with close friends (kin and non-kin), and the difficulties of fitting in locally as couples find and fit into communities and social circles in the host country.

5.3.1 Sustaining/negotiating connections with kin

5.3.1.1 *Coming out to the parents*

'Coming out' to parents played a key part in the interviews I carried out during my fieldwork. For some participants, the episode was challenging and frightening, as it

tested familial bonds and emotional boundaries. At the same time, however, these episodes seemed to bring partners together and tighten their trust, confidence, and ties to each other. Though the act of coming out may seem as a deeply personal and individual one, the experiences of the interviewees in this section made me realise that coming out bears a highly relational connotation, as it causes emotional and everyday consequences for the person coming out, as well as for those ones close to that individual. In that sense, 'coming out', along with its familial consequences, illustrates the social nature of emotions (Harding and Pribram, 2009). This section exemplifies the 'discursive' and 'practical' nature of feelings and emotions (Svašek, 2012a and 2012b); the experience of 'coming out' is full of fear, expectation and potential shame for both, the person coming out and the family, hence, challenging personal relationships and cultural prescriptions.

In my interview with Ashlee and Helen, for example, Ashlee told me that she came out first to her brother and mother; a month or so before telling her father. She says that she does get along with him, but that it has been always been a challenging relationship over the years, due mostly to 'different worldviews', she argued. Some of her comments on the matter illustrate this further:

Ashlee: *I do get on with my dad, it takes a lot of work but I do get along with my dad... It's long and complicated, but basically, in a nutshell, my dad is very friendly, a very materially generous person who lacks empathy, and has a very fixed, very conservative view on how the world should be. So, he and I have always struggled to find common ground so as people we just don't tend to get along very well because we have very, very different perspectives of the world... But we work on it.*

Ashlee's account is interesting because it proves that individuals do not necessarily come out only to those who they feel closer, emotionally or intellectually speaking. Like in her case, coming out was, in a way, easier due to geographical distance and the emotional stability she had achieved in her relationship with Helen. When Ashlee told her dad about Helen over a Skype conversation, her dad claimed to 'not know what to say' about the subject in the moment. Six months later, after Ashlee brought up the matter again, her dad seemed receptive and even enthusiastic about the prospect of meeting Helen:

***Helen:** We Skyped semi-regularly, like every couple (of months) ... But six months later I was like, so I'd like to come home this summer and see everybody and I'd really like you guys to meet Helen, and I was like, how do you feel about that? And he said, 'that's great, I'd really like to meet her!'... He had time to digest, process... Talk to his pastor or whatever he did, I don't know.*

Did Internet telephony technologies (Skype in this case), distance, patience, and/or even counselling from a pastor (as Ashlee suggested) played a part in bringing the situation to such a positive outcome? Did the fact that Jenny was in a coupled relationship a significant part in this too? Authors like Baldassar (2008) and Wilding (2006) comment on how families embedded in transnational contexts use ICTs and create a sense of 'virtual' intimacy/co-presence in order to maintain relationships across space and time. The lack of face-to-face interaction or physical co-presence, of course, has different consequences in their relationships, but as the case above shows, it may also provide parties with the space to reflect and manage their relationships in mature and positive ways.

In other cases, though, participants had come out to their parents while being single, and it took years for their relationship to get better. Arianna, for example,

explained to me how she endured years of 'silence' and 'ups and downs' in the relationship with her parents after coming out, but that the situation started to improve significantly once she told them about her partner, Virginia. The fact that they live under the same roof and own a car together seemed to also have contributed to making things with her parents a lot better. Recently, her mother told her: 'well, at least you have Virginia, you're not alone'. In this sense, is it possible that being 'coupled' may have contributed to the change of attitude of Arianna's parents towards her own sexuality?

In a way, yes; I argue that her mother's reaction, and even the long-strained relationship with both of her parents can be explained through her parents' feelings of frustration and broken expectations in relation to their daughter being a lesbian, as Arianna told me. However, possibly by being in a coupled relationship and by carrying out traditional tasks typical of coupled life – buying property, living together, etc., Arianna may have unintentionally given them new means to reassess, re-negotiate and mend their ill-feelings towards their daughter's homosexuality. In fact, this narrative illustrates Finch's (2007) concept of 'displaying families' (theoretically discussed in section 2.3.3 of chapter 2). Being in a coupled relationship, and performing socially recognisable acts of what that entails, enabled Arianna's parents to recognise their daughter's relationship as somewhat conventional and ordinary, hence, eventually accepting it and coming to terms with it.

Like in Arianna's case, Sasha, was also confronted with the weight of all the gendered and cultural norms and expectations around him once he came out to his mother; he was only able to disclose his sexuality to her, lest the possible negative consequences of his gayness for his father's social and professional networks:

Sasha: *I never told my dad about myself because I'm his only son – I have a half-sister, and my mum only has me... So,*

yea, I'm the only son. And my mum and I had an agreement: when I told my mum about me, she asked me not to tell my dad. It's not about him personally, but it's about his environment right now. His environment is different than him; his friends, his Russian friends, they have never lived in other countries for a long time like my dad has... My dad did live in America, he did meet a lot of gay people and he travelled so much around the world. He had a diplomatic job for some time, so he's very opened minded. He would accept me, I know that, but his friends, you know... My mum didn't want my dad's environment to start affecting him in a bad way because his friends, his partners, business partners would have a very bad reaction to that.

Sasha's words make me wonder if due to greater heights of national and international visibility of LGBTQ movements, there is an increased pressure for LGBTQ persons to come out. However, for many of these individuals coming out implies the potential of being 'cut off' (financially, or emotionally), and/or hurting their families' social and professional networks, like in Sasha's case. 'Coming out', and the western metaphor of the closet, seem to dismiss the social, economic, and cultural location of many individuals; reflecting upon the participant's anecdotes, I consider that the act of coming out is potentially more than just an individual rite of passage, and affects, not only one's environment, but the networks and livelihoods of the people around that person. In this sense, the effects of coming out may be 'milder' in highly individualised societies in the West, but in other geographies like Ukraine (where Sasha is from) the realities and limitations of coming out are considerably different, thus, leading them to work out creative strategies in order to sustain and negotiate their sexualities with kin. Patience and the aid of siblings,

as I will discuss, have often played a positive role in dealing with these situations too.

Another participant, Anish, for example, understood that the realities of being gay in India were far different from the ones experienced in the U.K., so he has tried to be sensitive about that, and though his family is well aware of his sexuality, and even visits him and his partner often, the process of coming to terms with Anish's sexuality and his relationship was notably challenging for his parents:

***Anish:** Coming out was a bit complicated... We revisited the idea of getting married. I talked to my sister first... She was very excited about it... And then I said that I was going to tell our parents about it... And she was going to be on standby, because I knew that once I talked to my parents, my parents would call her. I spoke to my parents and I said that... I can't remember how I phrased it but I may have said, "I have some good news... You know Anders and I are in a relationship and are planning to get married." Straight forward. My mum was in utter shock, she couldn't talk to me, she said, "what are you saying? I can't understand" ... Interestingly enough, I thought my mum would take it better than my dad but it just turned out to be the complete opposite. There was a lot of crying... So, I said, look, you need to come to the wedding, and we need to sort out your visas and all that kind of stuff because they live in India and we were planning to get married in Norway...*

Then, visiting Anish's family brought to the forefront a topic similar to the one Sasha was talking about, that is, the importance of the family's social networks back in the country of origin. Naturally, the management of that has been rather

prudent from both sides, showcasing, both, the complexity of coming out, and the necessity of non-disclosure in specific social/cultural contexts:

Anish: *As far as I'm aware they haven't discussed it with anyone yet (Anish's sexuality) because even now when we go back, like the last time we went to India... Almost 4 years ago... We stayed with my parents, and Anders was introduced as a "good friend", and there were other family friends who would come to visit and then ask me about, "when are you going to get married? Shall we find a girl for you?" And Anders is there you know? I think it's something a lot of people know, but it's not something people would confront my parents with.*

However, coming out and living his sexuality and relationships openly with his family was not necessarily easier for Anish's partner either. In spite of being born and raised in Norway, Anders believes that his family's traditional values and the fact that they come from a very small rural community may have influenced their attitudes towards homosexuality and same-sex marriage:

Anders: *I don't think my parents were prepared for us getting married. It's quite difficult... We decided to do it in Norway; we wanted to do it locally close to where I grew up.*

Anish: *They initially didn't want it in the village...*

Anders: *I was the first one they knew to get married, as a gay person... They're quite traditional, not religious, but traditional... So you know, "what will people think?" They even said quite hurting things like, "we don't think gay people should get married", and even saying, "we don't want to come to the wedding"... It's quite hurtful, but eventually, they came*

around two weeks before the wedding... They said, "Okay, we'll come

Anish: *I think the context is also important because Anders' parents live in a very small village, so I don't think that there are any gay people around...?*

Anders: *No, not really, there are a few, but they moved away, like I did... Small village, and people chose sides... Lots of bad feelings in our village.*

The above is also an example of how managing one's sexuality with relatives can sometimes be a difficult and upsetting process. Moreover, when it comes to things like marriage, the significance of this institution is of such big social and cultural dimensions, that any attempt of redefining it has the capacity to challenge people's deepest emotions and beliefs, to the point of troubling kinship networks. Also, in Anders' case, and as he argues, context is important for understanding the complexities of managing and negotiating one's sexual identity with others.

For another participant, John, coming out to his family proved to be a long and testing process. John's family is highly traditional and religious, and it took his parents quite a long time to get used to the idea of one of their sons being gay:

John: *So, it was some time after that I actually came out with my parents, I was going out with a guy... I only did it at that time because it was important to him to validate our relationship... He couldn't understand why if his parents would know, why couldn't I tell mine? I'm glad that I did... I had the attitude that I'd tell them when the time was right for me, but actually, the time would've never been right for them. So in a way, it was better to get it over with early on... I was 23... Yea*

that sounds about right... It was Christmas... It was the day we were having a meal to celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary. I told my dad because I thought he'd be more understanding... And no, he wasn't... Possibly more so than my mum. And he said, "I think you should go to the pub with your brother while I tell your mother". So, I did that... When we got back home my dad just said, "She's gone to bed". The next day she didn't really talk to me very much, and we didn't really talk for a few months... Then we gradually got used to not talk about it, but I think they found it easier not to talk about it and I found it easier not to talk about it.

Eventually, the situation seemed to change once John his relationship with his current partner, Mateo, got serious. This effectively links with the discussion on coupledness and 'displaying families' (Finch, 2007) at the beginning of this section:

John: *So this year things have changed quite a bit since telling them about Mateo... Because they have a lot more open than I expected towards meeting him... Went very well... It went kind of normal.'*

Mateo: *It felt good. I've seen them twice now, so we met first back in October... It went well...*

John: *They came to London and we had lunch, but it all came about because we had started to travel together quite a lot and so I like to tell my parents where I'm going, what I'm doing, so it became quite difficult to not talk about him.*

Coming out to his parents also involved coming out to his siblings, 2 brothers. Although they are both as religious as their parents, presumably a generational difference has played a part in making things 'easier' with them than with his

parents. One of his brothers has even helped in easing the relationship between John and his parents.

***John:** Then we met them in December, the day after Boxing day; my little brother and his wife were there... He had met them already before, actually they were the first ones, and actually that helped. The relationship is very good but they have their religious thing going on there, so they are very religious, still... I've got two brothers - My older brother lives in South Africa and is a pastor there... and my little brother is here in Birmingham. Although they probably have the same view that their religion says it's wrong... I think it's a generational difference, that it's not so weird culturally... Even if they don't like it, they can acknowledge it, talk about it.*

In this subsection, I discussed the different complexities of 'coming out'. The data that used for this purpose exposed the relational, social, cultural, contextual, and emotional connotations embedded in this matter. Moreover, the couples' necessity to 'come out' to their families reveal their willingness and desire to establish greater authenticity, honesty, and closeness to their family members. Distance and transnationalism may exacerbate such need for 'closeness', but as the accounts here also showed, they also give people the space to reflect and gain perspective on their intimate lives. In the next subsection, 5.3.1.2, I provide an interesting example on how these transnational same-sex couples – through the use of materiality –creatively communicate and sustain intimacy with their families.

5.3.1.2 Lost in translation? Connecting with the partner's parents

One of the reasons why I decided to include material culture narratives in my fieldwork was because I believe that materiality, and the practices around it, provide insightful information on people's intimate life, their sense of belonging, and personal beliefs. Authors like Dant (1999: 2) for example, argue that '[w]e express ourselves as part of this society through the way we live and use objects... The things that we relate to have embodied within them the social relations that gave rise to them through their design, the work of producing them, their prior use, the intention to communicate through them and their place within an existing cultural system of objects'.

Participants Anish and Anders enjoy the visits of both sides of their families to their home, but although Anish's family speaks English fluently, Anders' parents do not. However, as Anders' parents visited and got more comfortable with Anish, interesting and creative exchanges started to develop between him and Anders' mother. For example, since language barriers limited their communication, Anders' mother taught Anish how to knit, and consequently, a sort-of-intimacy and 'mute' language developed between them. Certainly, material culture (the yarn – see image 20 below) and the actions performed with it (knitting) enabled them to express and performing acts of intimacy, thus demonstrating the centrality, value and active role of materiality in social life:

Anish: *My feeble attempts at knitting, which is something that Anders' mum taught me how to do, and she gave me the yarn and the knitting needles...*

Anders: *Because my parents don't really speak English, so it's better to communicate through doing stuff. So, my mum will help around the kitchen sometimes...*

Anish: *But I think things are improving a lot... My Norwegian has improved, so I can have conversations with them, watch Norwegian television together...*



Image 20: Yarn and knitting kit; Anish and Anders

But as these couples get closer to their family members, particularly the parents, other unexpected and problematic dynamics can unfold. Accordingly, in the next section, I will explore the complex power relations that existed, or developed over time, between parents and the participants, or between each of the participants' parents.

5.3.1.3 Power relations with parents, and between each other's parents

Power dynamics are heavily featured in some of the interviews of this study. In the first case, I look at the relationship between Helen and her mother, Margaret. As I

will show, this sense of control and power from a parent not only affected the Helen, but also her relationship with her partner, Ashlee. As Helen told me, moving away from her mother's home eased the tension with her mother, however, that did not necessarily stop Margaret from 'speaking her mind' constantly:

Ashlee: *Your mum... I really like Margaret. I really respect her and think she's an amazing woman. I think she's used to dictating.*

Helen: *Yes. That's definitely fair.*

Ashlee: *Like, the last time you went home, last September, which was right at the time of the Scottish referendum, like she refused to even discuss it, but she would just... these derogatory comments about it when you're watching the news? She's not used to being challenged... She often wants to have political conversations, but they're often one-sided political conversations!*

Helen: *Also, because we're quite young, I think she needed some time to get used to the idea that she wasn't the biggest influence in my life anymore, and that she had lost a certain amount of control over me, which she had been losing anyway because I left to uni and that kind of thing. But I think that she needed definitely to get used to there being another big relationship in my life. She wasn't necessarily going to be the big authority in my life anymore.*

Ashlee: *I mean, when we were dating it was a little bit different because I obviously wasn't part of the family as*

such, but I was someone Helen considered family. And I guess that it just took some time... I don't mind her (Helen's mother) being critical of me; it's when she's being critical of Helen that it makes me really mad and I kind of have to bite my tongue...

The main theme in this story gravitates toward loss of control and influence. Margaret was probably confronted with something that perhaps a lot of parents go through: accepting that their own children inevitably grow up. As adults, they start making their own decisions, move away from the family home, and build new and meaningful relationships with others. A sense of emotional displacement is probably the best way to describe Margaret's reaction to Helen's relationship with Ashlee. As Helen argued, she is not under her mum's control anymore, and that can be a difficult thing for a parent to cope with, or even understand fully. The literature of emotions can also throw some light into this discussion, as Harding and Pribram (2009) hold that it is important to analyse emotions as they operate, and shift, in changing social circumstances. Helen's journey into adulthood, and into a coupled relationship, perhaps affected her mother's sense of security and authority, and the expression of that, as the interview excerpt above suggests, was often verbally offensive.

In a way, this is comparable to stories we hear about 'the in-laws' interfering in a couple's life. I see this 'intrusiveness' as a method some parents use to still feel like they have a sort of role or influence in their daughter's or son's lives, even if they are adults already. Sometimes their comments and actions are perceived as 'good advice', or as practices of explicit love and care, but unfortunately, these are more often read as invasive and unsolicited. Helen and Ashlee, for example, talked about Margaret's constant indiscreetness and judgemental opinions about their relationship; sometimes, Ashlee and Helen felt that she still thought that she could get away with saying hard and hurtful things to Helen, as she was 'her mother',

and perhaps, 'knew better'. Also, her interference was not only expressed through words, but through materiality, specifically, by sending them 'judgemental gifts':

Ashlee: *Ugh, the judgemental gifts.*

Helen: *Our Christmas gift... After she'd gone home, (she) sent us a box of more Christmas gifts which turned out to be things to replace, things that we had here and she didn't like... Like tea towels and oven gloves, and a soap dish in the bathroom. She's very critical; she's traditionally been very critical of me. She's critical of everything, she's hard on me, and my brother and sister, but she often prophases out things like 'I'm telling you this because I'm your mother and I love you'.*

Ashlee: *Which absolutely makes it absolutely an okay thing to say... That was sarcasm. I'm about to punch you in the face, but it's for your own good.*

Helen: *When I used to live with her she used to say things like 'oh, are you going to do your hair today?' and I'd be like 'I've already done it, thanks'. Or, she comments on my appearance, or she used to anyway, she doesn't now... Constantly talking about my weight, what a big problem it was... And we would go shopping for clothes and stuff, and I used to hate shopping for clothes because it would just be really embarrassing for me because of her attitude, like, because she would be so critical of everything. I couldn't even tell what I liked and I didn't like, because all I could see were opportunities for embarrassment. And I obviously didn't go shopping with her for a long time because I grew up and got a job and moved out and went shopping by myself, and then I*

had to figure out what it was what I liked because I hadn't had the opportunity to like anything before because it had been about minimising the pain I was going to go through every time.

Power relations like this, however, did not only present themselves from parent to daughter/son only. In other cases, I was able to notice the existence of a power struggles between Julian's and Umut's parents. Indeed, this was evident in some narratives around specific material objects in their house. At some point, they showed me two gifts that Umut's mother had given to them. After seeing them, I concluded that they were presents that served a clear purpose: display. Indeed, the first gift (image 21 below), the mirror, she gave it to them when they first moved into their current house, while the second one, a series of different paintings she did (image 22), is currently displayed in their kitchen. Notably, these items are strategically located in their house – at the entrance and in the kitchen – both, very social spaces.



Image 21: Mirror; Julian and Umut



Image 22: Kitchen art display; Julian and Umut

Of particular interest is the fact that, as our interview progressed, Umut and Julian also made it clear that Umut's mother was quite a presence in their lives – besides

giving them presents, she called and visited often. This, at some point, Julian said, sparked a kind of jealousy from Julian's parents, not only because they were feeling that they were not as involved in their son's life, but because even when looking at the decorations in the house (Umut's mum's gifts included), everything seemed to be overly Turkish, and not enough space had been devoted to British 'stuff'. Correspondingly, Munro and Madigan (1999; in Svašek, 2012b: 17) assert that 'contradictory demands with regard to the various uses of domestic space may also create tensions between family members'.

As a response to this, Julian's parents started giving them gifts that heavily conveyed British life, particularly from Newcastle, the region where Julian and his parents are from. Among these, they showed me a coffee table book compiling photographs of British seaside resorts and a set of coasters displaying Newcastle's heritage and monuments (images 23 & 24, respectively):



Image 23: Coffee table books; Julian and Umut



Image 24: Coasters; Julian and Umut

Interestingly, Umut's sister and her husband gave them a coffee table book on Istanbul (also pictured in image 23) that was similar, in its photographic approach, to the one Julian's parents had given them. Significantly, both are displayed along

each other in the same room in the house, exemplifying the cohabitation of British and Turkish cultures within their home.

In all, the discussions about power relations within families are deeply connected to some of the literature on emotions that I discussed in section 2.2.2.2 of chapter 2, particularly that related to emotions as discourses (Svašek, 2002, 2012a) and emotions as social in character (Harding and Pribram, 2009). Indeed, our emotional responses are often prescribed by our cultural backgrounds, and power relations, like the ones between parents and their children, are played out with strong context and culturally-specific discourses and codes underpinning them (Svašek, 2002).

5.3.1.4 *Intimate eulogies - Remembering grandparents*

Some participants went beyond their parents and siblings and commented on the attachments and stories with their grandparents. Sadly, in both of the accounts, the grandparents had died some time ago. These relationships with the 'deceased' are thought-provoking, because they challenge understandings of intimacy that tend to favour physical contact, reciprocity, and closeness. The role of material objects in these narratives will be central here, because, as Hallam and Hockey (2001: 1) put it, '[m]aterial culture mediates our relationship with death and the dead' so that it is possible to explore interesting intersections between memory, emotions, loss and meaning-making. Furthermore, the data here demonstrates that 'people's emotional life is not only shaped by direct confrontations with human and nonhuman environments, but also by inner dialogues with internalized presences – embodied memories and imaginations of phenomena in these environments' (Svašek, 2007: 230). The 'emotional efficacy' and 'primary agency' of material 'stuff' is illustrated in this subsection in the sense that they will demonstrate their

capacity to 'express and evoke emotions and make themselves "known"...' (Svašek, 2007: 243).

I start the discussion here by focusing on three items that belonged to Ashlee's grandmother, Joan. In spite of Ashlee's difficult relationship with her, it is interesting to see how, as the narrative progresses, Ashlee and Helen become more reflective on their relationship with Joan. They recognise her as being a woman 'of her generation', and though not 'super-affectionate', as Ashlee notes, her correspondence with them actually reveals the sensitive and thoughtful sides of her personality; indeed, she may not have been the most affectionate grandmother in person, but the letters and the necklaces she gave to Ashlee and Helen are a testament of other means she used to create intimacy and connections with those whom she loved.

The correspondence with the grandmother is particularly relevant as it deals with how communication and interaction with different others is shaped by Internet literacy or by age. Authors like Baldassar (2008), Bowlby (2011) and Wilding (2006) have written about how families communicate across transnational contexts, and how older generations may prefer phone calls or letters to ICTs, as they do not necessarily feel comfortable with them.

Ashlee: *My paternal grandmother passed away this past year (2013), which was sad but complex... When she heard we were going to get married, she was always accepting of Helen. She wrote us this really lovely note (image 25)... And it's one of the one of last letters I have from her... So, this is important... It's complicated... She was a hard woman to like... She loved us very much but she was a horrid woman to be close to... Very much of her generation... I think her acceptance of our relationship was important to me.*

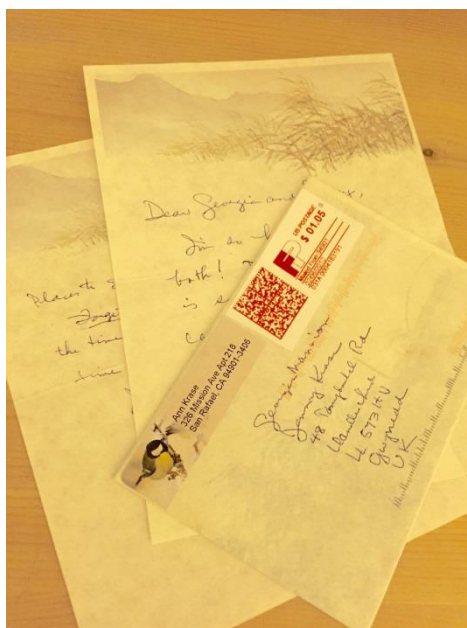


Image 25: Ashlee's grandmother's letter; Ashlee and Helen

Helen: *I think that Joan was a really interesting person... She went to Smith's... She had two degrees... And I think that for a woman of her generation that is really impressive... Done lots of impressive things and was a very accomplished woman... A lot of reasons to respect her... So, I think that your relationship with her was complicated because there are so many things about her that you respect and want to emulate but there are also so many things that you can see and that you don't want to repeat..*

Ashlee: *My granny was... A not super-affectionate person... She was a quirky person... So, she enjoyed history and old stuff and things that had a connection to family... They belonged to her.*

Helen: Joan gave us these (see necklaces in images 26 & 27) and for me it was a really poignant moment because it felt like, one, that she was doing that and then she was getting ready to say goodbye, but also, two, it was the first time that I had met her and this... Because we got... Like one of this is mine and one of them is Ashlee's and it's because they're exactly the same thing in that they're equally important... It felt like a complete acceptance of me and our relationship.



Image 26: Joan's necklaces #1; Ashlee and Helen



Image 27: Joan's necklaces #2; Ashlee and Helen

Indeed, these objects are important to them because they signify Ashlee and Helen's special connection with Joan, but also her approval of their relationship. These items, at some point, helped to keep them connected despite the distance, but now, in a way, they bond the three of them, even after her death. In this sense, the necklaces also illustrated Svašek's (2012b) theory on subject-object dialectics, as they blur the illusion of humans being the sole controllers of their man-made world. After all, the necklaces evoke particular emotions, attachments, and are repositories of emotions and memory-making, as illustrated in the excerpts above.

Finally, the necklaces' own biography, in terms of ownership and geographical mobility, are also representative of Svašek's (2012b) theorising on transit, transition, and transformation (see section 2.5.2). First, the movement of the necklaces and this couple to Britain, and to, therefore, changing circumstances, can be described through what Svašek (2012b) described as transit. Importantly, 'transit' also considers the instances before and after the subjects (Ashlee and Helen) acquired the objects (necklaces). Secondly, I explained how the meaning and value of the necklaces altered as they were given to Ashlee and Helen (transition), and lastly, how transit-related changes, evoked through the necklaces' transit and transition, re-negotiated, and *transformed* their own memories, attachments, and assumptions about Joan.

Similarly, in another interview, the subject of grandparents also became a central part of the conversation. While going through their 'stuff', Sasha suddenly remembered the item that his partner Felipe probably treasured the most, a statue of the Virgin Mary, given to him by his grandfather (Image 28):

Sasha: *I think the most important thing for him... It's that thing from your grandpa... the María, the statue of María...*

Felipe: *She's like our strength... We believe more in her than in anything else. I keep her because she was a gift from my granddad and he passed away four years ago... He always believed in her, and I believe in her, and I just kept following it, really. She's like my biggest guardian. My granddad was... A big role (model) in my life... When my mum and dad divorced, I wouldn't say I was left (behind) by everyone, but I was like, thrown into my grandparents' house (for them) to raise me... I was 13, 14... So, the most important part of one's*

life is when you're like 13 to 18, your teenage years... And I spent them with my grandparents and it means a lot to me, a lot. They did an amazing job, the both of them.



Image 28: Felipe's María; Sasha and Felipe

The objects discussed here by Helen and Ashlee, and by Felipe and Sasha, I argue, can be read as 'transnational objects', as they carry deep emotional signifiers of place and co-presence: "Transnational objects" ... are important largely because of their tangibility – they can be touched and held and thus take the physical place of the longed person or location. They represent, or more specifically, "stand for" the absence of being' (Baldassar, 2008: 257). Furthermore, the fact that these objects were kept in association with diseased members of these participants' families exacerbates the importance of these pieces.

5.3.1.5 Alienation and feelings of un-belonging

In this subsection, I turn to an exploration of how participants deal with the not-so-positive aspects of intimacy and family life. Though intimacy is often associated with practices 'which enable, generate, and sustain a subjective sense of closeness and being attuned and special to each other' (Jamieson, 2011: 1) and with qualities such as care, respect, honesty, and choice, I discuss here the tensions, power conflicts, painful memories, and feelings of un-belonging that some participants talked about during our interviews.

The data and discussion presented here is comparable to Goulbourne et al.'s (2010) and Baldassar and Vuorela's (2013) discussion on how feelings of alienation, trauma and disappointment are at times present and intrinsic to family life. The negative emotions discussed here by their interviewees arose from frustrations in terms of family practices and expectations underpinned by gendered and cultural norms and divisions. By focusing on the accounts of participants Zach and Gabriella, I will explore feelings of un-belonging and estrangement, and their impact on the personal, emotional, and even coupled life of these individuals. These two stories are indeed representative of some of the 'reciprocal, though uneven, exchange of caregiving' (Morgan, 1996; in Baldassar and Vuorela, 2013: 7) relations present across all of the participants' narratives in regard to their family lives. Equally, they express the intergenerational and familial obligations, negotiations, and loyalties 'that are simultaneously fraught with tension, contest, and relations of equal power' (Baldassar and Vuorela, 2013: 7).

1. Gabriella's story: On gender, tradition and forgiveness

Firstly, I will concentrate on Gabriella's narrative. Her account illustrates the challenging and difficult side of intimate life not only in relation to one's interaction with family members, but also when it comes to realising how cultural and social expectations inform, but mostly limit one's opportunities for reflexivity and happiness. Gabriella's story, however, is particularly

significant, as it is the account of someone who, despite experiencing a very strained and frustrating relationship with her father, persevered through the years with the aim of understanding it, and eventually finding some sort of resolution.

Arguably, Gabriella's attitude during our interview was also a consequence of maturity and experience. At 49, Gabriella had experienced the loss of her mother at a very young age, endured physical abuse from her stepmother, continuous verbal violence from her father, and an unhappy heterosexual marriage. From the moment she first fell in love with a woman (not her current partner), she never looked back and moved far away from her family in order to create a new life. In this sense, her story is comparable to the experience of millions of other gay and bi men and women. Moving away from home has inevitably been the solution for some queers in order to live their lives (Cant, 1997), but it has not necessarily been like that for many others (Fortier, 2001, 2003).

Gabriella: *My dad is Italian, so he's very kind of strict, traditional, male-patriarchal, head of the family, you know, 'men are at the top of the chain, women come second', that kind of thing, that's what I grew up with at the time... My mum was Spanish... had two children - me and my older brother, who is 18 months older than me, and then when I was 4 or 5 years old my mum died of Cancer, so my dad was on his own... And then he met an Italian lady who also had 2 sons and he married her, so then there were now 4 children and my dad and my stepmom... And this woman was just horrible, she was just a very, very cruel, vindictive individual and he was married to her for six years until she died of Cancer as well, unfortunately. I was 13 when she died, so you know... I was the*

only female in the family with three brothers and my dad. My dad put me straight in my mum's shoes – I was the one who had to take care of the family. So, from the age of 13, I was in this caring role, you know? Taking care of my brothers, cleaning up the house, cooking, and stuff like that...

The gendered norms imposed on Gabriella since such an early age are quite evident. A recent study on British-Italian transnational families (Goulbourne et al., 2010) actually share the accounts of women that, similarly to Gabriella, had to keep up with gendered customs and expectations which were very rooted in Italian culture. Some of these included cooking meals for the entire family, doing the housework while the male members of the family were free from such responsibilities, and even taking care of their younger siblings. It is no surprise that with so little free time, Gabriella feels that she really did not have the opportunity to know who she was as a person back then:

Gabriella: *So, there was always all these stuff going on, that meant that I wasn't able to kind of develop.... I only know this in retrospect because I've had a chance to think about it as an adult, but I don't think I had the opportunity when I was a child, and when I was growing up in my teens and into my twenties, just to develop myself and find out who I was because I was always too busy doing other stuff.*

Cant (1997) argues that for those non-heterosexuals who move away, 'migration can bring opportunities for people to develop their lesbian and gay identities', as well as new occasions 'to reassess their childhoods' (Cant, 1997: 6). Gabriella's story is, in this way, a good example of this. As her

story develops, she became more reflexive and critical as she shared it (this was explicitly acknowledged by her in the passage above). Certainly, after leaving the childhood home and away from familial pressures and expectations, time allows for individuals to develop a new sense of themselves, and a new ability to reassess their past and life stories in a new light (Cant, 1997).

Gabriella: *I can remember as I was growing up, I desperately wanted to leave home because I wasn't very happy at all... I just wasn't allowed to be me. Just this person regardless of any sexuality... His idea of my future was that I was going to get married, pump out lots of children, and, you know, support my husband. And for me, that's not how I wanted my future to pan out. I didn't know what my future was going to be, but it was going to be more than that. So, I just longed for a normal life, whatever that was... I met the guy who turned out to be my husband when I was 19, he was 21, and that was in 1985 when I met him. I moved out of the family home to go and live with him, 'cause things were just getting too rocky at home, and my dad liked to lash out physically. My brothers were growing up and they didn't take it from him anymore, but with me being the only female in the house, I was the easy target. So, I decided to move in with Mark, so I was with him for, God, how many years? Got married, had two children.*

Cant's (1997) assertions are indeed exemplified by Gabriella's 'coming out' story; at some point, she even recognises that time has allowed her to see things differently. Also, she explains how, despite recognising her attraction and feelings towards women, she still carried on and married a man, as it seemed to be 'the normal kind of thing that everybody else was

doing'. However, she addresses her desire to have children as part of her decision:

Gabriella: *I knew I was attracted to women before I met Mark (her ex-husband), that's the bizarre thing. I really wanted children. My brothers were getting married, it just seemed like the normal kind of thing that everybody else was doing... To be honest, there was a lot of social acceptance from my family... I can remember, my dad had had a couple too many glasses of wine ... He wasn't a big drinker... and he said to me, 'I'm so proud of you... You married, you've got two lovely children, you're going to be just fine.' And I thought... 'Is that the best thing that you can be proud of me for? The fact that I'm married and I've got two children? Anybody can do that! I want you to be proud of me for something that I have achieved, that is merit worthy!' In his world, that was important to him... From his generation and his culture, coming from Italy, that's what women do, that's how life progresses.*

Finally, Gabriella's narrative ended with her trying to make better sense of her relationship with her dad, as well as a new-found desire to achieve understanding and resolution. After years of not speaking to each other, Gabriella decided to reach her dad once again, despite the possible negative consequences. In the end, it seemed like her decision was the right one; time and distance have probably offered a new perspective and a new opportunity for them to mend their relationship and work on their differences. Furthermore, the following also speaks to the matter of emotions; time, maturity, and her coupled relationship with Victoria have given her a new perspective and emotional strength to, finally, reach out to her dad. In this sense, we can see how emotions 'function as social practices

in continually changing circumstances' (Harding and Pribram, 2009: 4), in mobility and in time.

Gabriella: *So now, it's got to the point where my dad is 80 years old, and I'm kind of thinking to myself, 'sooner or later he's not going to be here anymore, and I need to do something about this'... Even if he tells me to fuck off... I just need to tell him once that I love him, and then that's it, that's what I need to do. On his birthday, in February, I called him and he actually picked the phone up, which is amazing because before that, he refused to pick up the phone to me.... He sounded very receptive... He sounded older, really old, and he was just very, very sweet... And he said, 'you need to come down and see us sometime', and I said, 'dad I'd love to... You need to meet my partner, Victoria, she needs to come down too'... And he said, 'yea'. And I said, 'are you sure you don't mind?' He said, 'Gabriella, it doesn't matter'. I thought, 'why couldn't you have been like this 12, 13 years ago? All these years have gone by... It's taken a lot for his heart to soften'.*

2. Zach: On religion and alienation

A sense of alienation was also evident in Zach's childhood narrative. Despite the fact that him and his partner were both raised in Jewish households, their stories are marked by very different experiences and circumstances during their upbringing. Gil was born in Russia but grew up in Israel, and his parents followed a very secular tradition while raising him and his siblings. Zach, on the other hand, was born and raised in London in an Orthodox

Jewish family. As a result of that, Zach scorned Judaism, and for many years, refused to associate with that community. He figured that the only way to live a peaceful gay life would be away from Judaism, and so was the case until he met Gil.

While telling me about their initial encounter and first dates, Zach goes on to say the following:

Zach: *So, I realised he was Jewish but actually, this was not a selling point to me at the time. It is now (laughs). Although I am Jewish, I was feeling displaced from my Jewish identity; I wasn't feeling an accepted part Jewish culture because of my sexuality... I was brought up in an Orthodox environment, which led to various conflicts with my sense of identity...*

Gradually, and unintentionally even, Gil brought Zach closer and closer to Judaism again. Despite his secular upbringing, Gil was, and still is, very connected with Jewish culture, particularly with the Klezmer music scene (as discussed in section 1.2.1 of this chapter). They also joined a liberal and LGBTQ friendly synagogue in London, where they were able to build a new social circle, and, with time, also provided them with a strong and welcoming community to rely on; Zach refers to it as his 'synagogue family'. This is narrated by Gil towards the end of the interview; here's a brief fragment of it:

Gil: *My education and upbringing wasn't particularly religious. As I mentioned, I was born in Russia but when I was 6 years old my family moved to Israel, and all of my education was in Israel, so there the religion (thing) is kind of like a default thing... You have all the holidays and things like that... But they didn't go to religious school or to synagogue... It wasn't really*

part of my life. But only after moving here, more so after meeting Zach, it was a journey for both of us... We joined this lovely community that we found and became part of it.

As evidenced here, and as studies like those by Pahl (2000), or Weston (1991) have argued, in recent years, the concept of family has gone through interesting phases as it expands and includes a wide range of relationships as part of one's family. While Zach maintains an uneasy relationship with his kin, his partner and his new 'synagogue family' have come to represent the closest thing to family that he has ever known – 'friends as family' (Pahl, 2000), or 'families of choice' (Weston, 1991).

5.3.2 Friends "here" and "there"

Continuing with the discussion on friends and meaningful friendships, it is fair to say that stories about friends and long-lasting friendships were common throughout the fieldwork interviews. Therefore, in this last segment I will concentrate on how friendships are indeed a central part of how migrant transnational same-sex couples experience intimacy, and how due to distance from kin, they are eventually considered family. While addressing this, I will pay particular attention to how participants manage and sustain their friendships through time, given the fact that many of those who they consider 'friends' (kin or non-kin) are geographically distant; hence, issues of co-presence and place/geography will also be examined.

The works of Spencer and Pahl (2006), Pahl (2000) and Bowlby (2011) were particularly helpful in framing the discussion in this section. In this sense, Spencer and Pahl (2006) argue that adult friendship-like bonds in the contemporary West are made up of a variety of patterns and types, and are not confined to non-kin

bonds. Likewise, the same authors highlight that the importance of these ties relies on the quality of bonds, beyond blood relations, arguing that they are sources of social support, happiness, and well-being (Spencer and Pahl, 2006).

Furthermore, according to their study, 'the values of friendship are increasingly infiltrating or "suffusing" expectations of family relationships—including the expectation that any long-term sexual partner will also be a friend and companion' (Spencer and Pahl, 2006; in Bowlby, 2011: 609). This was also true for many of the couples I interviewed – Participant Helen, for instance, seemed to have a very good relationship with her partner's parents and sibling.

In this research, I found that friendships, whether with kin or with non-kin, were particularly important to the interviewees. Often, though, and because of the migrant situation of these couples' friendship networks tended to be composed of non-kin members, but not exclusively.

Participant Federica, for example, had a very close and special relationship with her younger brother, Jacopo; they talk often over the phone and visit each other as much as possible. Among some of the materiality that I discussed during my interview with her and her partner Emma, they showed me a mug that Jacopo gave to Federica years ago (image 29 below). The mug, in many ways, works as material evidence of the friendship and emotional attachment between Federica and her brother:

Federica: *My brother gave it to me when I went to Madrid... My brother picked it; I used to like cows when I was young... And my brother bought it for me the first time I left the house... When I was 21... He was 17... So, every morning I could have breakfast and I could think that I was at home even if I wasn't because I had something that was from home with me... That's one of the necessary things that I bring*

around. If I were staying somewhere, I would bring that mug. I mean, not for a weekend...

Emma: But that's really impressive; coming from a 17-year-old brother, that kind of sentiment is pretty impressive.

Federica: But it's the kind of think... Jacopo giving me something that is like... I can think of him every day because I have my mug and I'm at home and now he has a mug that I bought for him... But it's the first time he left the house, because he's now in Germany, so I bought him one with mice, because he likes mice.... It's like the thing... We're really close.

Emma: Yea... that's really important for her, I know.



Image 29: Mug; Federica and Emma

However, since Emma and Federica have lived in the UK, the necessity to build friendships and a sense of family with non-kin has become central for her. Even the place where she lives now with her partner was chosen bearing in mind that a close friend lived nearby:

Emma: *I think we picked it (the neighbourhood) because there was a... Federica's very good friends who live here just down the road, so...*

Federica: *The thing with this friend is, I met her when I first came to London, when I did my internship, and it's like, we have agreed that I would be living not too far from her, a bus ride away. You have to build your own network, your family network again. You live so far and isolated... You don't have anyone so you have to build it. She has my house keys... We've grown apart a bit, but at least if something happens, I know she would be there.*

Indeed, most of the participants in this research lived far from kin and non-kin friends, and the only way for them to sustain those relationships was by using the Internet (Skype, e-mailing, etc.) or old-fashioned letters and postcards. In this regard, Bowlby (2011) argues that friendships overtime are mostly possible by 'face-to-face, embodied meetings', while also acknowledging the exceptions to that:

Of course, friendships can be and are sustained through virtual communication from the old-fashioned letter and telephone call to mobile phone texts, emails, online discussions, and blogs. Moreover, virtual communication can facilitate some exchanges of confidences through its anonymity, as helplines show. Nevertheless, current studies suggest that in the majority of cases friendships need to be sustained by occasional co-presence. Indeed, virtual communication—especially texts and emails—is often used to

co-ordinate such meetings and virtual communication tends to be more frequent between those who also meet face-to-face.

(Bowlby, 2011: 611)

In this regard, participant Umut showed me two pieces in his house which are central to explaining the ways in which he personally related to his friends across geographies, but also across time (or in memory). Hence, this data illustrates the 'complex links to the past, present, and future' (Rouhani, 2015: 359) that are experienced as Umut experiences transnational migration and the construction of a home and belonging elsewhere; likewise, it is reminiscent of the work of Boym (1998), as it similarly explains the ways in which migrants materially express their connections to their childhood memories and people through decorations, 'knick-knacks' and other 'stuff'. Image 30, below, for instance, shows a street sign that Umut and Julian brought from Turkey and was then displayed in their garden. The sign refers to a street behind to where his best childhood friend lived, and in my analysis of it, a piece that indicates Umut's personal attachment to that friend and his own childhood memories. This is what they briefly had to say to me about the street sign:

Umut: *We also travelled with a street sign.*

Julian: *It is on the garden wall... which is the street behind his best school friend's house that he grew up in... that his friend grew up in.*

Umut: *Yea, it was actually a coincidence... It's fallen off, so it was actually on the ground covered in graffiti, so we actually didn't take it off the wall. But we did sort of smuggled it out of the country, yea.*



Image 30: Street sign; Julian and Umut

Equally, Umut and Julian also discussed a bright red dog-shaped lamp (Image 31, below) that was given to them some 8 years ago by one of Umut's best friends from Istanbul. The lamp was strategically and stylishly placed by their mantelpiece, and was, in my opinion, a material expression of Umut's friendship with that person. From what they told me, his friend went into a lot of trouble to find that specific lamp, and unsurprisingly, they also admitted the significance of this friendship in their lives:

Umut: *He got it as a present, and well, his girlfriend said that it took them about 4 hours to find the shop... He knew that it was in Soho, but he didn't know anywhere in Soho, so they had to walk all the streets.*

Julian: *He was such a sweet guy, he spent [so] much time trying to find it (the lamp).*

Umut: *He has a very special place in our lives.*

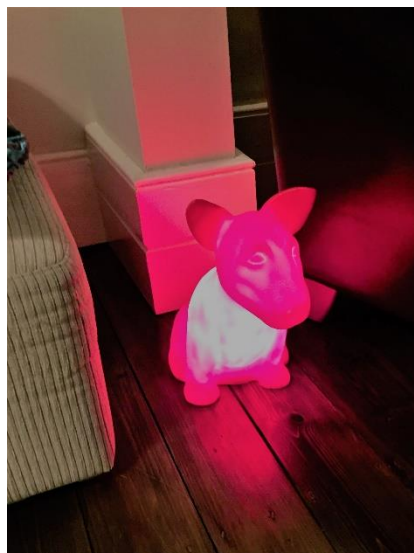


Image 31: Dog lamp; Julian and Umut

Making new friends in a new place is not an easy task, however, especially if you approach the social world as a couple, rather than as an individual (as it was Federica's case). Certainly, this was one of the main topics of discussion with participants Ken and Martin. Since they moved to Iceland in 2012, Ken and Martin have tried to build networks and make friends along the way, however, that endeavour has proven to be a difficult one for them.

Ken: *It has been challenging [life in Reykjavik]... Probably the big thing, apart from the weather, which has been wretched... Socially, I think it's been a sort of a hard time... We were living initially in Hafnarfjörður... It's a small town... We were living there for six months... Looking back, it was really hard... We really didn't know anyone... The few people we knew were colleagues of Martin's, PhD people... Super boring... Really very dull.*

Martin: *Which is a being surprise; we definitely didn't come into living here thinking that it would be a piece of cake... Like,*

we sort of psyched ourselves up thinking like 'ugh it's going to be tough, we're going to be poor all the time, and it's so expensive to live in Iceland... And a lot of those issues actually didn't transpire in a way? The challenges have been something completely different, that we didn't see coming. I don't think either of us have ever struggled socially before, and moving to Iceland was one of the first times where it felt like it was very difficult to make friends and make close connections, and integrate into sort of ... the culture.

Ken: *I started thinking... Is there something wrong with me? But I never had that problem before. And I've talked to other people who say the same thing... A French friend, she also wondered 'is there something wrong with me?'... I don't know, it's been challenging.*

Martin: *The other thing that we often wondered if it is the case, is that Iceland is one of the first places we've ever moved where we've been a couple that we didn't have a network of people that we were sort of coming into? ... Iceland is kind of the first time we kind of picked up, moved to a new country, didn't know anybody, and as a couple... And I think that, sometimes, as a couple, you're actually much more limited in what you can do socially. People sort of interact with you differently because you always come as a pair, so that's one of our thoughts. It might be this combination of Iceland just being a bit difficult to crack, but also this kind of new way of socialising.*

The dialogue above between Martin and Ken is also a good illustration of the agency, but also of the opportunities and limitations of social capital, especially as a coupled unit (Goulbourne et al., 2010). Certainly, it shows how people re-evaluate previous experiences (in Martin and Ken's case, their surprise at not being able to forge strong friendships in the present, which seemed in absolute contrast with their past), detail the resources available to them (the pre-emptive attitude towards a possible 'money issue' in Iceland, and the fact that they now 'act' as a couple, rather than as individuals), and the prevailing power relations (Ken and Martin, both being immigrants in Iceland). All this information brings important reflections in relation to 'what is possible' in specific spaces and places, and the conditions and resources available for human action; in Bourdieu's (1980; in Hiller and Rooksby, 2005: 22) words, 'the relation to what is possible is a relation to power'. In this sense, Martin does a good job in summarising their situation, believing that whereas Iceland in itself might be a part of the 'problem' when it comes to socialising, but the fact that they now approach the world together, as a couple, also plays an important role in this situation. After all, as acknowledged by Martin, their social capital and circumstances have shifted as a consequence of this. In his own words, 'as a couple you're actually much more limited in what you can do socially. People... interact with you differently because you always come as a pair'.

Moreover, the migrant and transnational aspect of their lives also plays an important role in the way they reflect on their lives and what comes along with it, including friends. Ken seems to think that, in comparison to people he knows, there are particular challenges that migrant couples have to face when it comes to, among other things, building friendships and 'some sense of community':

Ken: *I have often compared... I have some friends back in Belfast. They both grew up in Belfast; they both have their jobs there [and] love being there... They met a few years ago*

and now they're married... And for them... They're not having to ask, I mean, I'm sure they have their own challenges, but they're not having to sort of ask some of these questions or trying to find a place... They have their community, they have their jobs, they have purpose... It makes sense for them to be there. But I think it is a challenge for us, and there's a lot of people in our situation: to find somewhere where you can both legally be, where there are opportunities, where there are, like, friends, or some sense of community... That's a lot to process and to ask for in a place.

5.4 Chapter summary

This chapter aimed to explore how transnational same-sex couples lived and experienced intimate life. My approach in doing was similar to Smart's (2007) take of the 'intimate' as something 'personal', relational, cultural, and full of moments of memory and self-reflection. Likewise, with the empirical evidence and aid of literature on the subject, intimate life was understood as a field in which contradiction, messiness, expectations, power relations, and positive and negative emotional outcomes interacted and informed each other continuously.

Furthermore, I aimed to show how transnationalism and sexual otherness were also key components in the way these couples experienced intimacy and familial life. Performing love 'at-a-distance' (Elliott and Urry, 2010), sustaining meaningful and caring relationships with others across different geographies, or feeling emotionally alienated from one's 'original' community and family because of one's sexuality, were some of the examples and situations presented in this chapter.

6 Transnational home(s): understandings and practices of 'home'

6.1 Introduction

In his book *Love, a history*, Simon May (2011) argued that love is closely bound to a sense of ontological rootedness; in other words, the human need for feeling grounded, and for, ultimately, finding 'a home for our life and being' (May, 2011: 6). Building on this idea, this chapter aims to address how transnational same-sex couples construe and practice the notion of home, but more importantly, how memories and recurrent doings of love and 'intimacy', function as key underpinnings of home-relates practices and aspirations. Indeed, the participants in this research connect this concept to their own daily activities with their partners, and to on-going and past meaningful relationships with other people too (kin and non-kin). Likewise, they express these bonds through associations and attachments to places, spaces, and objects.

Hence, I have decided to refer to these parallels and conversations between 'imagining' home and 'practising' home as *dialogues about home*. In the literature on home, authors like Ahmed et al. (2003), Boccagni (2017), Brah (1996) and Fortier (2003) have defined these 'dialogues' as 'homing' processes. Indeed, studying the relationship between the interviewees' ideas about home ('homing desires', as Brah (1996) would describe them) and the actual lived practices around this notion is important, as it gives us an overview of the participants' sense of belonging, but also of the ways that intimacy (not only between partners, but also with others, such as family members and friends), migration and transnational dynamics buttress their appraisal and doings of home.

The narratives around material culture at the participants' homes will be particularly useful here to reflect on the importance of materiality ('stuff',

decorations, and food) in the social world, particularly in relation to transnational fields, and also in its role in symbolising, embodying, and/or reproducing doings and constructs around home-making practices. This relationship and interaction between people, objects and spaces has been studied through a phenomenological angle by Ahmed (2006), and will be useful for the purposes of this chapter (see section 3.2.2, in chapter 3, for a discussion on Ahmed's 'queer' phenomenological approach).

As I stated in chapter 3, section 3.5, my fieldwork of the home was circumscribed to the 'social' spaces at the participants' homes, generally: the kitchen, lounge, front room, dining area, garden. This apparent 'limitation' resulted in rich data enabling the empirical analysis of ideas and practices around display, home-making, homing (Ahmed et al., 2003, Boccagni, 2017, Brah, 1996), and domesticity in the lives of these transnational same-sex couples.

Accordingly, the first part of this chapter will explore the different ideas and meanings that transnational same-sex couples attribute to the notion of home. I will start by discussing the different definitions of 'home' that some of the interviewees referred to. Here, I aim to understand a) what they comprehend by home, b) what makes them *feel* at home, c) their ideals associated this concept, and finally, d) how they connect home to memories, people, places and 'things', even.

Thereafter, I will proceed in the second part to analyse how those ideas of home are actually carried out in practice. Hence, this section will illustrate the closeness and/or distance between 'thinking' about home and 'performing/doing/practising' it. Certainly, questions like the following underpin this discussion:

- How have transnational same-sex couples in this research experienced home?
- Which factors influence the participants' notion of home?

- How have migration and transnationalism influenced or affected their experience of home?
- How do they 'practice' home on a daily basis?
- How do material objects, spaces and places signify and enable ideas of home to be materialised in everyday life?

6.2 Defining 'home'

As it was emphasised in the literature review chapter (section 2.4), the concept of home is multidimensional and complex. Mallett (2004), for example, stated that the idea of home could be associated with places, spaces, feelings, practices, or even states of 'being in the world' (Ahmed, 2000; Mallett, 2004). Comparatively, Flanders (2014) approached the concept as an ever-changing/evolving idea, while Tucker (1994: 181) connected it with 'conditions that allow personal self-fulfilment' and as something 'closely connected to our personality'. Moreover, as Blunt and Dowling (2006) show, the multifaceted nature of home becomes more evident in the context of transnationalism; indeed, 'research on home and transnational migration raises important questions that destabilize a sense of home as a stable origin and unsettle the fixity and singularity of a place called home' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 198).

In this section, I attempt to approach the idea of home as construed and discussed by the transnational same-sex couples in this study. Though the interviews had a strong narrative component, the semi-structured logic of my methodology allowed me to ask participants to reflect on the idea of home. Unsurprisingly, and as the literature on the matter suggested, the meaning of this word somewhat changed from case study to case study. Over-arching themes were found, however, as for example, most participants tended to link the word 'home' with people (usually their partner), rather than with physical locations. Nevertheless, the importance of spaces and places will also be evident throughout the development of this chapter.

6.2.1 Home is 'wherever I decide my home is'

I would like to start with the account of Adam, who revealed a great sense of detachment from his place of birth (Cambridgeshire, UK), but also to his family's current site of residence, Dar es Salaam, in Tanzania. He attributed this to his parents' own transnational and multicultural background (Adam's father is Irish-South African but born and raised in Kenya, while his mother is from Cambridgeshire, UK), and to the fact that he had moved constantly in the past. Indeed, after his parents faced bankruptcy while he was a teenager, Adam had to move and support himself through college. Later, his career as a dancer, entertainer and yoga teacher required him to move frequently. Consequently, Adam claimed at some point during our interview that home is 'wherever' he decided where his home is, and interestingly, also labelled himself as a 'patronomadic soul':

Adam: *In terms of sense of belonging... My mum is very English and identifies as that. My brother and my sister do. I'm much more similar to my dad who has this very, you know, we joke and say, this 'patronomadic soul' because... he grew up in Kenya... He misses certain parts of that country, but then he misses certain parts of England... You're aligned mentally to the way of thinking in that country to a certain degree, but I've never felt this sense of patriotism or belonging. When I was in India the only thing, which I was really missing... My partner, really... I was there for 4 months, because that's the longest period of time that I've lived in another country.*

Having worked as a dancer... Recently worked in Stockholm and Israel, and you are able to kind of pick up your bag, drop it and that's my home for there and then... Because this is the interesting thing as well, having my family move away and having moved away from my family as well, I don't feel necessarily attached to having to be where my family are... For me, it's kind of, in a way, wherever I decide my home is...

Adam's quote works as a reminder of the many possible connotations and associations that people may confer to the idea of 'home'. Indeed, it illustrates the fact that for many transnational migrants, the 'material and imaginative geographies of home are both multiple and ambiguous, revealing attachments to more than one place and the ways in which by memories as well as everyday life in the present' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 202). Equally, there is certainly an important degree of privilege when it comes to mobility in Adam's story, as he unabashedly discussed his journeys and travels to Scandinavia, the Middle East and India, but also, a quite unique perspective on 'moving', which has everything to do with the uncertainty connected to his nomadic lifestyle as a performance artist.

Later, when I asked Adam if his partner, Wojtek, also played an important part in his definition of home, he uttered a definite 'yes'. In fact, all participants in this research identified their partners as perhaps the central 'element' in their definition of home. In my first interview with interviewees Emma and Federica, for example, Federica claimed that 'Home is where she (her partner) is', and this sentiment was echoed across the participants' accounts.

6.2.2 Home as civic engagement

In this subsection, I concentrate on the possibility of 'feeling-at-home' (Ahmed, 2000) measured by one's capacity to feel as a recognised political subject; or, in

other words, the role of civic engagement as a necessary element of a definition of home. In my first interview with Arianna and Virginia, Arianna insisted on the importance of 'place'/context as a defining force behind her understanding of the home. I aim to show, however, that despite her attempts to remove people from her own definition of the term, her description ultimately carried important relational, social, cultural and political undertones. The political, in fact, stood as the strongest element in her account, as she linked her sense of freedom and security with her ability to 'integrate' and 'contribute' to the local community.

Arianna and Virginia met on a speed-dating event about three years ago and they currently live in Bristol. Virginia is originally from Scotland and works as an administrator in a local university, while Arianna is Italian, and moved to Bristol to pursue a PhD degree and an academic career. When discussing the idea of home, Arianna insisted on the importance of conceiving this term as a physical, identifiable location, and specifically, a *place* where she could express herself fully and feel like an active member of the community and world around her. It was evident, however, that her opinion was largely linked to a previous and negative experience living in Brussels as a student. The following excerpt illustrates this:

Arianna: *Home is where I feel I can be completely myself, where I feel safe and I have a sense of intimacy, and relaxed, and loved... I think that including Virginia in this would give a biased opinion, because everywhere she is, that's home, but personally, I think it's more the place than the people. This is because I've lived in places where I had people that were very, very close friends, and were always there, and I loved dearly, and I didn't feel at home at all... A sense of belonging [was missing], of being able to integrate in the culture, in the real city, in the place; the ability to recognise my passion, and the ability to also contribute positively to the place.*

Although Arianna's reflection was mostly, and in her words, about describing home as a place, I argue that her account also carried important associations between home, freedom of expression, people, and citizenship. Firstly, she described home as a space where she could be herself but that also enabled her to feel safe, relaxed, and loved. Likewise, the latter part of this passage revealed that Arianna's conception of home is also related to her capacity to feel like a full political subject (with freedoms and responsibilities) in a particular context: she used words like 'integrate', 'belonging', and 'contribute' to convey this message.

Interestingly, this political idea of home resembles Tucker's (1994: 184) discussion on home and identity:

Home is where we could or can be ourselves, feel at ease, secure, able to express ourselves freely and fully... Home is the environment that allows us to fulfil our unique selves through interaction with the world. Home as the environment that allows us to be ourselves, allows us to be homely. Since in a home environment we can express our own identity, home is the source of home truth. Home may be an emotional environment, a culture, a geographical location, a political system, a historical time and place, etc., and a combination of all of the above.

As in Arianna's case, Tucker (1994) refers to freedom, security, and the political side of life as essential markers of what home may be associated with. Both quotes implicitly reflect on the relationship between home and ontological security, as they suggest that the freedom and security seem to depend on a sense of (political, in this case) certainty or consistency. If ontological security can be interpreted as 'the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in constancy of their social and material environments' (Giddens, 1990; cited in

Dupuis and Thorns, 1998: 27), I propose that Arianna's account in fact illustrates the uncertainties associated with living as an immigrant, but also, the complex and entangled multi-layered every day realities of 'home', like the yearnings for a sense of belonging, integration, and 'feeling-at-home' (Ahmed, 2000).

6.2.3 'The ideal home'

Imagining the ideal home is associated with social and cultural constructions of this term, but also with personal (affective, sensorial, spatial, and temporal) memories and the need for security (Mallett, 2004; Jackson, 1995). Certainly, a considerable part of the interviews that I carried out led to discussions about the future, and these were usually related to how the participants conceived the idea of an ideal home and where/how they saw themselves as individuals and as couples in a few years' time. As the next case study shows, and as previously argued by Somerville (1992), the liberating and confining notions around the ideal and real home are in continuous and permanent conversation. Somerville (1992) also states the financial limitations and restricted degree of choice that most people have in regard to their housing options. Hence, it is pertinent to acknowledge the privilege that is exercised by the participants in this research, as all of them own or rent property, are able to 'talk' about their present and previous experiences of homes and houses, and even better or improve their living situation through home-design, decorating, etc.

As previously stated in the introduction of this chapter, as well as in the theoretical discussion on the 'transnational home' (section 2.4.3), central to idealising 'home' is the idea of 'homing' (Ahmed et al., 2003; Boccagni, 2017; Brah, 1996; Fortier, 2003), as it refers to 'the variable distance between the real home conditions and the aspired ones' (Boccagni, 2017: 23). Though the following discussion could have been interpreted in terms of the importance of place (and to a certain extent

this is the case), I feel that it is mostly about acknowledging the constraints of real life, and envisaging one's possibilities of building home in the present and towards the foreseeable future.

In my interview with participants Umut and Julian, we touched on the subject of London, the city they had been living in for 13 years at the time of our interview, and the possibilities of conceiving it as 'home'. Although London was never their 'ideal' place in terms of settling down, it did offer them space and the resources to bolster and stabilize their relationship, mostly in financial terms. Once we started to develop this topic more, Umut commented on how uncertain he felt when first moving to London, as it did not exactly represent his ideal of 'home':

Umut: *I was very hesitant to move here, so I said, maybe we will probably live in the UK for two years and then move to Spain or somewhere... warm'.*

Throughout the interview he kept referring to this 'warm place', which reveals how the weather has played a big role in his idea of home. Later, Umut admitted that they had constantly thought about possible alternative places to live in the future. Such romanticised places would usually be associated with a warm climate and a cheaper lifestyle, though they would also have to be in Europe, he stated. Nonetheless, Umut also admitted the unrealistic nature of that of moving away from London, at least for now. According to him, a move would be difficult for a variety of reasons:

Umut: *We don't know anyone anywhere, the only option apart from London, would be, maybe, Newcastle? Where I wouldn't go to, solely because it's too cold, if it was hot I would go tomorrow... And London has a lot going for us, so I can put up with the climate, but if you go outside of London to other parts of the country, it's still very expensive and still*

very cold in comparison to other European cities... Every time we go on holidays we keep asking ourselves "can we live here?" but we can't obviously... Spain, we like Greece... Those countries, they're lovely, nice climate, nice geography... But it's the language... it's another language you have to learn.

Additionally, this quote displays the relative privilege displayed by participants like Umut. Though the 'cold' British climate seems to have been an on-going concern for him, the mobility factor was not. However, it is unfair to only read Umut's desire for 'hot weather' in terms of his class privilege. On the one hand, his statement makes an important point when it comes to the importance of bodily comfort/sensations and the construction of the 'ideal' home. In this sense, we learn that idealising home may not only be associated with abstract thoughts and conceptions around the notion of home, but to actual physical bodily affectations and needs as well. On the other hand, I also understood that Umut and Julian would prefer to stay in Western Europe essentially because of the legal protections it provides for LGBTQ people. This pursuit of physical safety on the participants' side compels me now in the next subsection to turn to a discussion on the possibility of construing the home as a safe 'queer' space.

6.2.4 Home as '(queer?) safe space'

In the previous chapter on transnational intimate life, I discussed the issue of alienation and un-belonging (Section 5.3.1.5). There, I featured the cases of Gabriella and Zach, who, for different reasons, moved away from their blood-relatives in order to develop their gay and lesbian identities. For these two individuals, as well as for other interviewees in this study, moving away and building a home with their partners meant an opportunity to create a space free from the different oppressions they faced. The work of Gorman-Murray (2009),

similarly addressed the different 'migrations' experienced by non-heterosexuals throughout their lives in the quest for self-discovery, intimacy and belonging. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that not all participants in this research identified their childhood home as oppressive, and previous academic work like that of Fortier's (2003) acknowledge this by problematising the tendency to portray the heterosexual childhood home as always and unmistakably repressive.

After finally moving away from her father and siblings, as well as from a heterosexual marriage, Gabriella re-invented her life and her sense of home with her partner, Victoria. In the following extract, Gabriella and Victoria talked about Gabriella's children and the change of dynamics when they are around:

Gabriella: *Now all of a sudden, it's about us!*

Victoria: *Now, we do have a daughter home for the summer between here and dad's house. That changes the dynamic – she's vegetarian, and kind of, doesn't pick up after herself very well, so having one or both of the kids at home really changes the dynamic... It does make it different; not nearly as relaxed.*

Gabriella: *I love the kids, and I would never, ever, deny their need to come home if they needed to because that's just what you have to do. I would never close the door to the children. But by the same token, I really appreciate our own space, you know? It's something we've worked hard for and it's just lovely having our own space...*

This dialogue is significant because it showcased their effort to find a balance between being mothers while building and enjoying their relationship. In this sense,

in my field notes I wrote the following: 'I see their commitment to protecting their relationship and their home from outsiders, including their own children'.

Similarly, after distancing himself from his family and all the homophobic and Jewish Orthodox connotations associated with them, Zach became very attached to the physical home he built with his partner Gil, referring to it as his 'number one item' (image 29):

Zach: *My number one item is the house – it's the house itself; the four walls. Just being, just having a nice clean place... It's a very comfortable sofa... That's important to me. I defend it.*



Image 32: Living room; flat; Zach and Gil

Zach's attachment to his flat is also reflective of 'the complex intimacies of subject-object relations' (Gorman-Murray, 2008: 298), extending our understanding of how and why people create attachments to places, spaces and/or things. In Zach's case, the flat emphasises the importance he now bestows on 'home', and this is affirmed by the physicality of home ('the four walls'), as well as by the domestic materiality in it (the 'very comfortable sofa'). This understanding reinforces a sense of ontological security and well-being for Zach.

6.3 'Doing' home

In this part of my chapter, I would like to concentrate on how the idea of home is experienced or practised by the transnational same-sex couples in this research. Central to this section will be the analysis of how objects, spaces and places come to embody and materialise 'home' in everyday life. Though participants factor spaces, places, and materiality as part of the imaginary construct of home – dreaming of 'the ideal home' in terms of its physical location, size, and material components, for example - I believe that it is in the daily practices or processes of 'homing' (Ahmed et al., 2003; Boccagni, 2017) where 'home', indeed, reaches its full potential. In section 6.2.3 of this chapter, I already indicated the importance of 'homing' as a way of understanding the participants' aspirations around the project of 'home'. In this way, 'homing' (see chapter 2, section 2.4.3) is mainly about the interplay between one's perceptions of the 'real' home and the 'ideal' home (Boccagni, 2017); this is usually expressed through the material and discursive 'project of home-building here and now', accompanied by the gathering of traces of imagined homes from the past, but also for the future (Ahmed et al., 2003: 9).

In this sense, the concept of affect, along with Ahmed's (2006) theorising around queer phenomenology, provide unique and important tools for the understanding of home-making discourses and practices. On the one hand, affect, understood as 'embodied dispositions and experiences that influence what people think, feel, and do' (Zemblayas, 2007; in Rinquist and Fataar, 2016: 523), can be interpreted as an important driving force behind the processes of 'homing' (Ahmed et al., 2003; Boccagni, 2017; Brah, 1996) and 'home-making'. It is through this affective place-making where these transnational same-sex couples display the ways they know the world, the values they have, and the relationships they develop with others (Zemblayas, 2003). In this sense, their own expressions of emotions, intimacy, relationships and domesticity are related to their specific cultures, class, families and value systems (Zemblayas, 2003).

On the other hand, Ahmed (2006) suggest that the interaction between memory, material objects and spaces in the site of residence produce a certain 'hybridity of the home' (Ahmed, 2006: 150) where the interaction of material cultures, bodies, spaces, past places, environments, stories, and genealogies make identities possible in the 'textures' of everyday life (Tolia-Kelly, 2004a). Similarly, Hoffman (1989: 278; in Ahmed, 2003: 9) would call this process 'soils of significance', as people actively and affectionately perform the idea of home through daily rituals, and the concrete materialities of spaces and objects at the home. Additionally, as I discussed in chapter 2, section 2.5.2, according to Miller (2008, 2010) material culture actively nurtures, mentors, and collaborates with individuals in the creation of their own relationships and overall lives.

The first part of this section will open with a discussion on how participants experience 'the domestic' realm; I will take a close look at how they actively construct domesticity, how they practice it, and how different factors – like people, objects, neighbourhoods, the city, and spaces within the residential place – all come together to form that 'hybridity of home' that Ahmed (2006) referred to in her own work.

6.3.1 Domesticity and home

In subsection 6.2.1 of this chapter, I focused on how interviewee Adam understood and defined home. However, it was not until his partner, Wojtek, intervened, that I got to understand how they, together as a couple, experienced and carried out 'home' on a daily basis. In Wojtek's own words,

We created a bit of our own melting pot... having been able to access affordable housing in London. We can live comfortably; we can have our friends over, the cat... And it's London, it's

Camden, it's close to central London, while at the same time it has this 'village-feel'... We live next to Hampstead Heath.

To this, Adam added the following about London:

I mean, you are constantly finding new and different things here and it's a very nice city to be able to live in... It offers you a lot. Apart from the weather (laughs).

These last two passages provide a good insight into what I already introduced as the 'hybridity of home' (Ahmed, 2006) and 'textures' of everyday life. Though in Adam's account (refer to subsection 6.2.1) Wojtek plays a vital role in offering a sense of home or groundedness, as May (2011) would argue, the dialogue between Adam and Wojtek proves that home goes beyond them as a couple, and also involves things like memory, past experiences, family history, and other various social relations. In fact, the material and geographical realities of home are present here, as both partners elicit the importance of places – 'affordable housing', the city (London), neighbourhoods (Camden), and public spaces (Hampstead Heath) – for the overall conception and experience of home.

Similarly, the conversation around places and spaces was also evident in my interview with Arianna and Virginia. Regarding the issue of 'place', for instance, it became apparent that their current city, Bristol, was central to their definition of home. In the same way, however, so was the memory of their childhood home – the Scottish countryside for Virginia, and southern Italy in Arianna's case – therefore highlighting the importance of childhood memories as pivotal to the idea and performance of home. Through British and Italian children's books they collect (image 33, below), we discussed the ways in which they successfully recapture a sense of childhood homeliness, while also providing a gateway for them to learn more about each other's past and cultural background. The books, as the next

passage suggests, have also delivered a space for comfort and intimacy, as well as a vehicle for talking about belonging:



Image 33: Arianna and Virginia; Children's books

Virginia: *It's about sharing our history... So, this is Geronimo Stilton, which Arianna bought for me and we've been read together, and which I absolutely love. So, if I'm having a bad day, read me some Geronimo, because he is just amazing! It really appeals to my sense of humour, it really makes me laugh!*

On the reverse, Arianna had never read any Roald Dahl so I've been buying her Roald Dahl books... Matilda, Danny the Champion of the World, and now she's reading Charlie and the Chocolate Factory... So, this is nice for me because these books were really important to me when I was a child, they make me feel at home when I was a child, so it's nice for me to share that with Arianna... For her to understand some of those cultural points that you get from books...

Arianna: *And then, recently, I've been trying to read more Scottish authors... Whenever we go to Scotland I always require a Scottish book to go with the journey, for it to feel more atmospheric, more part of the environment... Part of the reason that I think I like the UK so much is because I love British literature so much... And music... And my mum is an English teacher. So, I think that to have such a fertile ground to read books about the place I live is something that I missed completely in Brussels. I just couldn't relate at all. And here, you know, if I go to Scotland... I love the country, I love the language, I love the people... I mean, it's my family now, and then I'm also able to get a very, very good book set in those places... So, it's everything I need to feel happy and fulfilled.*

To begin with, I turn to Virginia's words as she refers to personal history, and to the role that domestic objects, like these childhood books, have in providing people with a sense of comfort, safety, and homeliness. Additionally, the fact that they read the books together exemplifies the way in which 'networks of material objects' co-exist with people and spaces, and how they jointly create meaningful and substantial environments (Woodward, 2007). I want to argue that these practices of close physical intimacy around materiality are essential for the understanding home; after all, it is through these intimate practices – like 'lounging' together as a couple while reading books to each other – that people are able to conceive and associate home with feelings of comfort, relaxation and security (Mallett, 2004; Dovey, 1985; Gorman-Murray, 2008; Moore, 1984).

This excerpt also promotes a conversation around belonging and feeling-at-home (Ahmed, 2000). Arianna's attachment and idealisation of the UK is quite evident here, as she even explains how her love of British literature, her mother's profession (English teacher), and even her negative experience living in Brussels

informed her current feelings and intellectual construction around Great Britain. Home, after all, encompasses 'memory... The ideational, the affective and the physical... The positively evaluated and the negatively' (Saunders, 1989; in Mallett, 2004: 70).

However, Arianna's feelings of belonging are even more robust in relation to Bristol, where they currently live. Her partner Virginia also holds similar feelings in relation to the city, and they have both shown it, materially speaking, in a variety of ways. One, by getting involved in local politics and activism with the Labour Party (see image 19 in Chapter 5, section 5.2.2.2), which I can also link with Arianna's desire 'to contribute positively to the place', as she revealed in section 6.2.2 of this chapter; and second, with visual art around their house which showcases their love for the city (see images 34 & 35, below). On the latter, they commented the following:

Virginia: *It was Arianna's 30th birthday last summer and I wanted to get her something special but different, but also something that would mean something to Arianna. I had a friend who is an artist so I asked her if she would paint of Arianna's favourite bits of Bristol, and particularly that bit (points at the painting, image 31) also because that's where her studio is⁹.*

Arianna: *That was one of the first things that I saw in Bristol when I arrived... The first area I lived in.*

Virginia: *And I think that was important... That it was, like, respecting, recognising the fact that she lived there, not just that she was a student... Not kind of downplaying that it really*

⁹ Although Arianna still pays the rent for that studio, and occasionally stays there when she needs to concentrate on her work, she still spends most of her time at Virginia's house.

was her home. That was her house when I met her. It's too easy with student things to downplay it and be like, 'well, it's not important, it's not home, it's a temporary thing', and I didn't want to do that. So, it was 2 weeks before her birthday... I've had the painting for a couple of weeks. My friend had framed it for us and it was hiding under the bed... It was all secret. So, we met in the middle of town...

Arianna: And I was super excited!

Virginia: And a bit late and she was all like frantic! Like, 'oh my God you'll never guess what I found; I bought us something for the house!' I was like, 'alright, okay, what's that?' 'This picture!' That is exactly the same view (points at the painting again), like 'I really wanted a picture of this area so I have bought us one!'... I was like 'oh my God, you ruined it!' We bought each other the same present. So, I didn't really know what to do in the moment because that was my birthday present, you know?

Arianna: I was a bit upset... I couldn't understand because it is a lovely picture... Meaningful!

Virginia: Meaningful, lovely...

Arianna: And for the house! So, I kept wondering, 'what's wrong?'

Virginia: In the end, I actually thought it was quite funny. And once I calmed down, I thought actually it was a great story... It is a nice story.

Arianna: *I don't think I had ever had pictures of the city I lived in in the house. And I guess that shows how important Bristol is to us.*



Image 34: Bristol painting; Arianna and Virginia



Image 35: Photo of Bristol; Arianna and Virginia

Finally, I want to focus on a particular space within Arianna and Virginia's house – the mantelpiece (Image 36). Mantelpieces, after all, 'were, for many generations, conventionally thought of as the focal point of the living room' (Hurdley, 2006: 720), adding a sense of identity and symmetry, while also being the centre for the display of objects, like photographs and valuable things. As Virginia and Arianna's relationship developed, Arianna started to spend more time at Virginia's house and eventually, even started to have a say in the house's decoration and use of space. The ultimate expression of this was when they both collaborated to build a mantelpiece. What started as a desire to hang a lamp in the fireplace, ended up being a significant and long project for them – buying the right building material, designing and planning, etc. – hence reminding us that "'home" embodies not only place, but also time' (Hurdley, 2006: 722). The fireplace in it, though not a real one, became quite important in the house, offering a space of relaxation, warmth, and romance, as Arianna goes on to explain:

Arianna: *It's clearly not a real fireplace because it's not open, so you can't light a fire, but we use the candles on particular occasions when we are particularly stressed or tired, so if I know or she knows that I am or she is particularly tired or had a bad day, or to celebrate, then we light the candles before the other person gets home. It's warm and romantic and nice.*



Image 36: Mantelpiece; Arianna and Virginia

From Arianna's passage, it is possible to talk about one of the central aspects associated with domesticity: comfort (Rybczynski, 1988). Indeed, the desire for comfort is connected to cultural definitions of dwelling structures as sites where materiality and 'positive' social relations interrelate to eventually create 'homely' homes (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). In this interview excerpt, Arianna described the importance of the mantelpiece for her and her partner, as it provides a space for relaxation, ease, and warmth. As I also noted, the mantelpiece was the result of a building and decorative collaboration between Arianna and Virginia, which highlighted the significance of these practices in construction of home, or the transformation of 'house' into 'home', and therefore, a 'homely home' (Blunt and

Dowling, 2006). Accordingly, this matter will be further explored in the following subsection, as I study the ownership and design of home.

This section focused on the coupled experience of domestic life, largely based on the account of my interviews with Arianna and Virginia and Adam and Wojtek, as they were representative of this theme. The data here highlighted the connections between the places and spaces, people, and objects, and of memory and everyday practices (Massey, 1992). Furthermore, it showcased material culture's capacity to not only provide comfort and domestic security to the participants, but also to guide them in the production of their coupled identities, thus supporting Miller's (2008, 2010) and Svašek's (2007, 2012b) research conclusions around material culture and agency. Finally, it also supported the idea of home-making is underpinned affective home-making practices and phenomenological understandings of 'how bodies, things and other phenomena, conceptualized as field of intensity and impact, work one another' (Svašek, 2012a: 3).

6.3.2 *Materialising domesticity: on the ownership and design of home*

Flanders (2014) emphasised the relationship between home and house by highlighting the ideas and experiences around 'the ideal home' (see Chapman and Hockey, 1999, also), 'home' ownership, and house design. Likewise, Blunt and Dowling (2006: 93) indicated the cultural importance of 'owning' one's 'home', as noticeably, 'ownership is termed "home ownership", rather than "house ownership", signalling that ownership is synonymous with home'.

Thus, this section explores how transnational same-sex couples have experienced ownership (or joint property ownership) and house design. This analysis follows previous research carried out by material culture scholars like Gorman-Murray (2006, 2007, 2008) and Pilkey et al. (2015) who have argued that physical homes

become sites of affirmation (in terms of identity), reconciliation, protection, and the ultimate embodiment of the relationships with their partners and other loved ones. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how people's interaction with materiality goes beyond mere processes of identity affirmation; in this sense, I will indicate how objects, and domestic spaces, have the capacity to 'mentor' and to actually define, and form who we are (Miller, 2010). Finally, the ownership and design of the home remind us that the concept of home has a lot to do with the materiality/ physicality of a home, as well as with the practices within and around that locality.

6.3.2.1 *Owning home*

Property ownership appeared as an ongoing theme in the data produced from this study; owning 'stuff', or a physical home, were central to the discussions with most of the participants, whether because some of them were financially able to secure property, or because being able to do so in the future was still an imperative goal towards the future. Literature on home ownership is varied, and though discussed in depth in the literature review chapter of this thesis (section 2.4.1), it is worth to recall some key points: Madigan et al. (1990) and Dupuis and Thorns (1996, 1998), for example, argued that home ownership is strongly associated to ontological security, continuity of self-identity, and a need for personal and familial security. Similarly, Dupuis and Thorns (1998) and Chapman and Hockey (1999) asserted that the need for home ownership could also be read as a reflection of social and cultural expectations around the 'ideal home', family life, and domesticity. Finally, and in relation to class, Gurney (1999) noted that homes often embody middle-class cultural ideals like home ownership, as it signifies stability and material achievement.

But if such need to own property is underpinned by ontological security, or a deep psychological need for security and 'being-in-the-world' (Giddens, 1990: 92), this

study problematises this further by bringing the transnational component into the picture. After all, to what extent do transnational migrants conceive more than one home, as Al-Ali and Koser (2002) suggest, and how does the data in this section challenge traditional understandings and frameworks on ontological security?

I start the discussion by reflecting on a particular painting that interviewees Victoria and Gabriella had displayed in their kitchen (See image 37 below). The piece, called 'Asylum Boy', was done by an artist from the East Midlands, and though it aims to depict a completely different migratory reality from the one Victoria and Gabriella have experienced, it does embody a recurrent narrative voiced by the participants in this research: the feeling that, due to migration and transnationalism, one's life has been reduced to a suitcase. Indeed, when describing the portrait, Gabriella rightfully asserted that the boy was carrying 'his life in a suitcase', and her comment was echoed by her partner, who followed by saying 'yes, his life in a bag... and amongst all the other pictures that this man was selling, and that one... I had to have it'.



Image 37: Asylum boy painting; Victoria and Gabriella

The sense of unsettledness and uncertainty experienced by transnational partners due to mobility and transnational dynamics was indeed prevalent throughout the study's interviews, and they are further analysed in the chapter 4 (Section 4.2). However, I focus here on how they negotiated these feelings and translated them

through the purchase of goods, home-building processes, and 'homing' (Ahmed et al., 2003: 9; Boccagni, 2017: 23).

Buying property together seemed to provide participants with a great sense of pride and ontological security. Moreover, this was also exacerbated by the routines and practices established around the 'things' they had bought together. Purchasing cars 'as a couple' is a good example of this, as Ashlee and Helen, for instance, describe how owning a car had improved their lifestyles and connection to others, as well as the feeling of satisfaction towards their physical home. Likewise, since they lived in the countryside, having the car had been an advantage in terms of transportation and access to urban areas nearby (see a picture of their car keys, image 38):

Ashlee: *We got a car this year... We wanted something that we would be able to use to carry the dog in and camping gear and stuff like that. Living out here, I think having the car is a really big deal... Gives you so much freedom to go places... We have people that come out to see us sometimes...*

Helen: *Often people that drive, because it's easier... But also, it's nicer for people to come visit us from other places now because we have space and we also have a place for ourselves that we like and enjoy, and like showing people, whereas before we lived in a flat in the city... And like, it was not that great... That kind of was a flat for the meantime, and this is our, like, home.*

Ashlee: *It does feel homey.*



Image 38: Car keys; Ashlee and Helen

Accordingly, Williams (1983) recognises the way cars challenge straightforward understandings of the private and the public; moreover, cars operate like 'mobile "domestic" environments, bubbles of privacy moving through public spaces' (Sheller, 2004: 44; in Hollows, 2008: 118). In my view, Ashlee and Helen offer us the possibility of thinking about home and the private beyond the physical house. The car is, in a way, an extension of that 'intimate sphere', but also a signifier of ontological security, as it provides a sense of constancy and reliability on things (Dupuis and Thorns, 1998). The stream of consciousness or the mental associations made in this passage, from talking about the car to the concluding remark - 'it does feel homey', take the reader through the journey of understanding precisely how the car intensifies and extends our understanding of the private and of home, or 'the spatial context in which day to day routines of human existence are performed' (Dupuis and Thorns, 1998, 29). Likewise, the car has facilitated the possibility of having visitors; living in the countryside, having a car seems to be a kind of necessity, as it makes it easier to transport people to and from their house and into the nearest urban centre, which in their case, happens to be Aberdeen.

Likewise, owning a physical home was an important theme throughout the interviews. To illustrate this, I will refer to the case of participants Umut and Julian

first. After 2 years into their relationship, they felt that they were ready to buy a house together. Unfortunately, the high property prices and living standards in London initially forced them to venture into areas away from their neighbourhoods of choice. Also, it is remarkable how in the next extract, Umut goes back to his experience living in Turkey as an added factor that informs his decision to look for a house, not a flat:

Umut: *It was really interesting for me to have all of these historic buildings in London, you know, the Victorian buildings; I love the concept of a house because I never lived in a house in Turkey... If you're an urban person you end up living in a flat. So, I thought (that) it was a really nice concept... I just thought that it would be nice if we could have a house, but obviously then we looked and this area is really expensive, so we moved out into zone 4 in South East London where we were able to afford a house, which is what I really, really wanted. We got that house, which was really exciting and we loved it. Didn't love the area, there was nothing there for us.*

Umut's desire for a house, instead of a flat, was partly informed by him growing up in a big city like Istanbul, but also, heavily influenced by traditional and romanticised ideas of 'home' and domesticity, as I will discuss in the next section. But to continue the discussion on ownership, I should mention that after 3 years in their first property, Umut and Julian bought a house in North London, which brought them closer to 'home'. In Umut's words,

It was great to feel that I was finally feeling at home with the person I loved.

Owning property, Giddens (1990) argues, is rooted in deep psychological needs. Hence, I would like to connect this 'need' for ownership, translated into a yearning

for materiality and security, with how practices around decorating and/or designing that material home also hold special qualities that are supportive of ontological security and identity affirmation. In this sense, I will show how transnational same-sex couples reflect their memories and their identities in the design, décor and 'stuff' they choose to display in their physical homes. This builds on research exploring the role of materiality at the home in reconciling and sustaining the self (See: Dupuis and Thorns, 1998; Gorman-Murray 2006, 2007, 2008; Tolia-Kelly, 2004a, 2004b; and Richins, 1994a & 1994b). Additionally, owning property as a couple (whether that is a car, or a house, or both) allows for the assessment of how such materiality is influencing the ways in which these couples define and understand themselves. As argued by Miller (2008: 287), '[m]aterial culture matters because objects create subjects much more than the other way around' (Miller, 2008: 287).

6.3.2.2 *Designing home*

Towards the end of subsection 6.3.1 in this chapter, I briefly explored the matter of 'homely homes' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006) – conceptualised by other authors as 'home-building practices' (Hage, 1997) or 'homing' (Ahmed et al., 2003; Boccagni, 2017) – as I discussed Arianna and Virginia's experience of building and decorating a mantelpiece in their living room. Appropriately, other participants like Victoria and Gabriella also highlighted the importance of the joint effort of 'making home'. The fact that Victoria was moving from the USA to the UK and into Gabriella's physical home, also added new dimensions into the importance of them building that space together. While the discussion started with me asking them for a simple definition of home, the conversation quickly evolved into a dialogue on the importance of home as a joint effort in 'doing it, designing it'. While Victoria's initial definition on home as a place of 'security and belonging' seemed initially

reasonable, it was their description of their efforts at 'making' home that, I felt, resonated more with both of them:

Victoria: *(Home is) Security and belonging.*

Gabriella: *I would agree with security and belonging but for me, I was always very aware of the need for togetherness. A shared home... For when you came over here that it needed to be about us... I didn't want for Victoria to feel as though she was moving into my home and that it would continue to be my home... Everything is shared.*

Victoria: *I moved into a home that I had been sending my things to in boxes, as you do, because you can't hold it all in suitcases; books, DVDs, all my things. When I got here it was all on shelves, unpacked... There were a few things that weren't because she didn't know where to put them.*

Gabriella: *But we kind of figured those out together then, didn't we, when you came over?*

Victoria: *My clothes were hanging in the closet when I came home, so it was like, yea... The couch was old and busted so we went out and chose new couches, and you know, the home improvements, we've all kind of been at it... Choosing the paint, choosing the pictures and it makes it a joint effort.*

Gabriella: *I've really enjoyed the process. Because for me, it's just creating something new, it's creating this thing that is between us, that is a part of both of us, you know what I mean? We chose this colour, we chose the kitchen, we chose*

the flooring... All of a sudden, the things that mattered to us in our house belonged to both of us.

Despite this 'coupled effort' between Victoria and Gabriella in building home ('creating something... this thing that is between us... the things that... belonged to both of us', as Gabriella put it), the materiality present in their living room also displayed their individuality, hence, their individual attachments and memories. An example of this is Victoria's license plate (Image 39), which showcased her 'American' sense of belonging and her memories as a state patrol in the state of Colorado. Also, in a corner, Victoria had a collection of little bells and ornaments (Image 40) that she referred to as 'a piece' of her family history, and as 'stuff' that reminded her of 'home and people'. These two pieces also illustrate Svašek's (2012b) and Miller's (2008, 2010) point regarding material culture's capacity to evoke memories and feelings. In this sense, it holds true that things 'express and evoke emotions and make themselves "known"...' (Svašek, 2007: 243).



Image 39: License plate; Victoria and Gabriella



Image 40: Bell collection; Victoria and Gabriella

Developing on the theme of designing home, I would like to turn to my interview with Anish and Anders. The latter part of our interview took place while we walked around their house and as they showed me different decorations and spaces that were significant to them. Initially, we started by talking about a Union Jack cushion on an armchair in their living room (Image 41):

Anish: *I think this object is interesting because I got that as a gift from Anders' British friends when I got my British citizenship... I said it's interesting because in a way I don't like it... I have a conflicted relationship with flags... But the nationalistic elements associated with a Union Jack, particularly given the imperial legacy of the Union Jack and the country...*

Anders: *So, we have that on display and the Norwegian flag in the dining room.*

Anish: *It's there because someone gifted it to us and it works quite nicely aesthetically but I'm quite conflicted about it.*

Anders: *It's been there for a while. But I'm definitely not a unionist or a monarchist.*



Image 41: Union Jack cushion; Anish and Anders

In spite of not being a favourite item, the cushion is representative of the fact that homes are also made up of social relations with others beyond the household. Family members and non-kin may be at times capable of playing a role in the configuration or 'decoration' of home by giving gifts, as it is the case here. Likewise, there may be situations, like this one, where the gift may not be entirely satisfactory but that it still becomes a part of the domestic space, for some reason. Though Anish explains the cushion's location and display in the house as purely 'aesthetical', I want to argue that the item is also representative of the home as a site of constant (re)configuration and contestation in terms of identity politics and belonging. Throughout our interview, Anish was very vocal about his stance against the current state of British politics – 'the Tory party is here and it's only going to get worse', he argued at one point – and also about the complex colonial history between India, his country of origin, and the UK.

Similarly, Anish later showed me three other objects that did not seem to carry any particular meaning for him, three Zambian masks hung up on a wall (Image 42). In our interview, Anish revealed that he had spent part of his childhood in Zambia, so the presence and display of the masks led me to believe that he had developed a special connection to the country. However, when I explicitly asked him if he had

any sentimental attachments to Zambia, he resolutely said, 'not at all'. He then continued to explain his 'troubled' relationship with Zambia in the following way:

Anish: *These are from Zambia (in reference to the masks), from the time that I lived there... I didn't like it at all. I disliked it; it was very difficult to live in. One, I perceived it to be extremely homophobic. The other thing was... Growing up in Zambia, I was almost... Kind of living in an Indian ghetto, and not just an Indian ghetto but a South Indian ghetto... It felt very monocultural and I didn't like that. It wasn't a very stimulating place.*



Image 42: Zambian masks; Anish and Anders

In relation to this, Perkins and Thorns (2000; in Mallett, 2004) suggest that home is also a place for memory and remembering. Hence, objects and decorations around the house may not necessarily be 'positive' reminders of one's past, but also statements about one's past experiences and life cycles, thus, indicating the complexity and fluidity present in the interaction between home experiences and memory (Mallett, 2004). Likewise, visual and material cultures, like the cushion and the African masks, allow us to understand transnational home-making practices as

dynamic and transformative. Though these items come to signify moral, political conflicts, and even negative personal memories, the fact that they are on display also suggest an acknowledgement of difficult memories and uncomfortable issues as part of one's life. It is interesting, however, that such negative connotations did not stop Anish and Anders to exhibit these items, particularly as 'home' is often thought of as a place of safety, positive connections, idealisation (Mallett, 2004), and self-fulfilment (Tucker, 1994). This reminded me of Parrott's study (2012) as she argued that transnational objects may be able to bring comfort, but they may also be able to produce, or increase, distress or feelings of unbelonging. Alternatively, though, Anish's masks may have provided him with the opportunity to distance himself from those childhood memories, and in a way, own them.

The encounter with Anish and Anders also revealed that books played an important part in their coupled life; both of them are academics, and also share cultural and artistic interests, like music and literature. In this way, music and films seem to be central to their leisure time together and are also featured in their library at home (Image 43). The following dialogue between the two of them explains their relationship to these items, highlighting, especially, Anish's connection to his own cultural background by actively buying and collecting Indian literature:

Anish: *The other thing that we like is books. As academics, we like reading and we got books, and we often gift each other books also... I suppose the other thing in terms of books is that whenever we go to India we try and get books written by Indian authors and we bring them back... Some classic books.*

Anders: *Music is something we share, something we do a lot.*

Anish: *A lot. I also like jazz.*

Anders: *The most important thing... I'm a musician as well. I play the viola, and yes, that is very important to me.*



Image 43: Bookcase; Anish and Anders

In the last two sections I aimed to discuss the issue of property ownership and its potential connections to home and ontological security. Specifically, I focused on car and home ownership, and how they provided a sense of domesticity, reliability, agency, and refuge. Then in this last part, I connected the importance of 'owning' stuff with how spaces and specific locations within the physical home are personalised, decorated, construed as 'private', and how such undertakings sustain processes of 'homing' (Ahmed et al., 2003; Boccagni, 2017), memory, ontological security, identity affirmation, and leisure.

6.3.3 The meaning of food

Food played a major role in the material culture narratives of this research. Indeed, participants would often think of food as one of the most meaningful 'things' to talk about during our interviews. As Petridou (2001: 89) suggests, food is a 'useful

vehicle for the study of meaning of home'; after all, 'the meaning of cooking and eating is frequently intimately bound up with ideas of home and family' (Hollows, 2008: 62). Likewise, food is a good example of the way in which migrants use and are affected by material culture (Parrott, 2012)

In section 3.5.3 of my methodology chapter (chapter 3), I indicated how food played a major role in my participant observation technique during fieldwork. For instance, I mentioned how participants used home-cooking and food to create a sense of comfort and domesticity, as well as means to get to know me and find commonalities between them, the research participants, and me, the researcher. In all, food-related 'stuff' provided an important medium to explore the embodiment of homeliness and even power dynamics between 'the researcher' and 'the researched' (See chapter 3, section 3.5.3 for more on this).

As initially noted, preparing and consuming food were important 'home'-related practices for the transnational same-sex couples in this study. Blunt and Dowling (2006), Hage (1997) and Kneafsey and Cox (2002) similarly discussed the importance of such 'home-making' activities in the case of different diasporic groups, as they 'reflect the mixing and reworking of traditions and culture' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 216).

In the case of the couples in this research, such 'mixing' and 'reworking' of traditions was ever present. Food, however, was also an embodiment of memory (Morgan, 2005), and its preparation, as Salih's (2002) study also explored, a site for reflecting on 'double belonging' and 'plural identity' (Salih, 2002: 56).

To illustrate these points, I will start with Victoria and Gabriella as they went through different items in their kitchen cupboards. This interview extract is a good example of the 'mixing' and plurality of identities present at a 'transnational home', as it showcases food's relationship to the participants' cultural heritage (evident in Gabriella's case) and the active (and material) connections to 'the homeland'

(manifest in Victoria's case). The first thing they displayed was Victoria's spice box (Image 44), which contained a variety of food ingredients Victoria recently brought back from the USA:

Victoria: *This is full of things from America... It's taco seasoning... Stuff to make chilli... Stuff to put on chicken... Chilli kits... Cuban black beans and rice...*



Image 44: Spice box; Victoria and Gabriella

Shortly after going over the items in this box, Victoria shifted her attention to a bag of Italian biscuits (Image 45) and commented the following:



Image 45: Italian biscuits; Victoria and Gabriella

Victoria: *That's you, that's you (referring to Gabriella)...*

Gabriella: *That's my Italian heritage.*

Victoria: *She loves her Italian stuff; in fact, she's a fantastic Italian cook. We've got vats of this homemade sauce that she makes.*

Gabriella: *I usually cook a big batch of pasta sauce...*

Victoria: *Man size! We freeze, we eat it... On meatballs, lasagne... You can't get anything in a restaurant that is even close... It is like food paradise! I would love to open a taco stand... I also make Carolina Pulled Pork*

Gabriella: *Oh, it's beautiful!*

In this sense, Bell and Valentine (1997) recognise the importance of particular foods, their preparation, and consumption, in the construction of sense of belonging, home, and diasporic spaces. Other participants similarly discussed certain drinks, food-related smells, and 'treats' as essential to their construction of

a 'homely' feeling. Coffee, for instance, seemed to be a constant theme among participants who came from countries with strong coffee drinking cultures. Such was the case of Arianna and Julia, who were Italian, and of Mateo, who was from Colombia. In the following extract, Arianna explains the significance of coffee in her life, and more importantly, how important it was for her to accommodate this drink in her relationship with her partner, Virginia:

Arianna: *Being Italian, drinking (coffee), especially in the morning is part of my culture, of my daily habits, part of my life since I was 12... Every day I have been drinking since I was 12... Only this brand of coffee, this is from my province... And... Virginia was the first British I was dating... I was a bit worried that I wouldn't wake up very early in the morning like at 5, half past 5 – she was living at the village at the time – and not having an espresso, a proper espresso in the morning. Seriously worried. But then... when we arrived the night before, I saw the mocha, proper mocha... and I thought, phew! Good sign for the relationship to work. It kind of reassured me, gave me a sense of familiarity, like a link, a connection with my personal background... So, I knew that there was one thing that I didn't have to explain, negotiate.*

Arianna's reflection on coffee is good illustration of Hollows' (2008) argument of food as being bound up to notions of home and family. Notably, Arianna placed special attention to how coffee might be negotiated in her relationship, as it holds an important part of her daily routine and personal biography, as she explained. In fact, studies like the one by Hollows (2008) assert that sharing meals and the rituals around food are essential 'practices through which people *make homes*' (Hollows, 2008: 61). Moreover, Arianna's relationship with coffee, along with the

other 'food narratives' in this section, support the thesis that material culture is in fact able to construct subjects (Miller, 2010).

6.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I aimed to understand the ways in which transnational same-sex couples construed and experienced home. The first part focused on the possible definitions, meanings, and ideals attributed this notion – home, as 'wherever I want it to be', home as a safe space, or home as a place where one is fully recognised as a political actor. The last part, however, referred to the experiences and actual practices of home. It is here where transnational couples attempt to materialise their idea of home – buying, decorating, performing domesticity, and even preparing and eating particular foods.

In the introduction to this chapter, I referred to the parallels between imagining/ thinking about home and practicing/ making home as 'dialogues on home'. Such dialogues are active, complex, often subconscious, and underpinned by traditional narratives of home and coupled love. In addition to this, however, I hope I have shown how the transnational component influences and reconfigures the material and imaginative geographies of home – dispersing and complicating understandings of sense of belonging and identity.

7 Conclusions: intersections of home, intimacy, and sexuality in transnational migration

7.1 Introduction

This research project critically assessed the ways in which transnational same-sex couples construe and experience transnational migration, intimacy, and home. A total of 12 couples participated (7 male and 5 female), and a variety of ethnographic techniques were adopted during fieldwork, including narrative interviews, participant observation, and the construction of narratives around material culture at the participants' home(s). The analysis of the empirical data drawn from this work was presented in three chapters, each focusing on the three main themes at stake: transnational migration, intimacy, and home. Despite such structural divisions, the intersections and connections between each one of the chapters was evident and inescapable. Each theme, or each one of its parts, nurtured the conversations and arguments made at different parts of another chapter; this contributed to a holistic view on the lives of these transnational same-sex couples, and most importantly, it also challenged the traditional and limited way in which we understand and conceptualise experiences of space, time, and memory.

In this sense, I can think of at least two different and distinctive occasions where the crossings were noticeable. Firstly, I raise one of the intersections present between chapters 4 and 5, as they bring transnational mobility and the intimate realm into conversation. Indeed, in chapter 4 (devoted to transnational migration), section 4.5, the discussion centred on the transnational practices of the participants around family life and care. Here I explored the different ways in which they sustained, longed, and favoured their relationships with family members across time and geographical distance. Similarly, in the chapter on intimate life (chapter 5), specifically section 5.3, I reviewed some of the enactments of intimacy present in the participants' narratives as they construed 'intimate life' as somewhat beyond

their coupled unit, and as something bigger, comprising friends, and family members too. These apparently 'independent' sections illustrated the fact that it becomes impossible to talk about one theme, in this case, the experiences of transnational migration, without touching upon issues related to 'the intimate'. After all, and as Svašek (2012a) asserted, human mobility shapes emotional processes, and vice versa.

Likewise, I can point out another instance, this time as I was writing up the chapter on home (chapter 6), when I came to understand that this notion was transversal and equally nurtured by the two other themes in this thesis. At the beginning of chapter 4 (section 4.2), for example, I explored how migration often brought about feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, this in part due to the lack of, and longing for, a physical place to call home. Then, in chapter 5, section 5.2.2, I examined some of the domestic 'doings' performed by participants in order to nurture, both, their coupled relationships, as well as the spaces in which they co-habit. This data spoke directly to the theme of 'home' as well; as it exposed the fact that homes are also emotional spaces where people continuously enact intimate practices and rituals for the purpose of sustaining ideas and feelings of home.

Accordingly, I have decided to present my conclusions in a way that effectively illustrate these 'boundary-crossings', or intersections. Indeed, the different themes in this thesis were manifestly interdependent and mutually necessary for each other; thematic limits and boundaries proved to be blurry, and what I often perceived as the 'limit' of one concept, often ended up becoming the beginning, or at the core, of another theme. The reflections and contributions that follow will then speak to a wide variety of disciplines and areas of research, like sociology, human geography, migration studies, home studies, gay and lesbian studies, material culture studies, among others. As it will also be evident, the queer (non-heterosexual) component in this thesis will be a notable issue across my conclusions. Ultimately, this project aimed to not only expose how the research

participants experienced intimacy, home and migration, but also how their non-heterosexuality was central to their understanding, interaction, and performance across these three themes. Certainly, this study intends to contribute to the academic efforts working towards the inclusion and serious study of LGBTQs in migration, intimacy, and home studies. Where appropriate (as in the case of transnational families), I will indicate the omissions and opportunities in the inclusion of non-heterosexuals within these academic concepts. It is worth mentioning that this study was not interested in comparing the experience of same-sex couples to that of heterosexual couples in international migration, intimacy or the home. However, I believe it started a much-needed conversation across these topics and the different disciplines that explore them.

Finally, I should mention that in addition to the concluding ideas on these themes, I have also added two additional sections, one on the methodological contributions of this research, particularly in relation to the construction of material culture narratives, and finally, a closing piece focused on my recommendations and opportunities for further research.

7.2 Renegotiating and reconciling family histories

Initially, I would like to turn to the coming out stories analysed in chapter 5 (section 5.3.1.1). These accounts elicited important intersections between identity, ethnicity and family life, which, I believe, have significant implications for our understanding of family and intimacy in the 21st Century. Indeed, I showed, through these narratives, that the act of coming out varies, and has diverse connotations and consequences for different individuals across the globe; participants like Sasha and Anish, highlighted the social and cultural implications of such act in Russian and Indian contexts, thus, challenging Western perceptions and assumptions in regards to sexuality and public life. Far from being apologists for

state-sponsored homophobia, these two participants and their stories actually demand an awareness, recognition, dignification, and sensitisation to other historical, social and cultural realities.

Likewise, I regarded these coming out stories as relational stories, in the sense that they were less about themselves, and instead, these were profoundly aware of their immediate family's wellbeing. Thus, there was a constant reminder throughout that intimacy is, essentially, quite public; their desire to come out had deeper and material implications on their family's social standing, and in historically collectivist societies like the ones they were embedded in, which could not be taken for granted. Accordingly, this data provided another way of reading intimacy; an intimacy, free of Eurocentric assumptions, and underpinned with a different sense of ethics in relation to care, family duty, and socio-cultural discretion. Hence, this thesis calls for the acknowledgement of non-Western intimate realities, their ethics, and ontological underpinnings included, in order to better comprehend the complexities of intimacy and sexual politics in today's globalised society.

Despite such different intimate realities, my empirical data also revealed the evident power relations existent in all the participants' relationships with their immediate family members. Certainly, the narratives allowed me to notice that the participants' parents, in particular, held a significant powerful position in these couples' lives. I enhanced this analysis with literature on emotions, linking it with Svašek's work (2002, 2012a) on discourses and practices of emotions, and with Ahmed's (2004) and Harding and Pribram's (2009) discussions on what emotions 'do'. I recall, for example, in section 5.3.1.3 of chapter 5, how Helen's mother still managed to affect, not only Helen individually, but also her coupled relationship with Ashlee. In the same section, I also discussed the influence of Umut's mother in his relationship with his partner Julian, and how that had later evolved into a passive-aggressive power dynamic between her and Julian's parents through decorative 'gifts'.

Also, in chapter 5, I examined the stories that participants shared about their grandparents and siblings, and the enormous influence that these family members have exercised over their individual and coupled lives. In all, this data worked as a reminder of the relative 'conventional' and 'ordinary' lives of my research participants. Far from being removed from their families, these power and frustrating aspects of their relationships with their parents are illustrative of the lives many people, non-heterosexual or not, lead. In this sense, my conclusion on this regard is similar to that of Heaphy et al. (2013:3-4) in relation to the 'ordinariness' and 'conventionality' they also found in their own research participants' accounts. As same-sex couples achieve greater social acceptance, their lives are, in turn, influenced further by traditional narratives and social expectations around family life.

Finally, I would like to finish this subsection by considering the stories included in chapter 5 in reference to unbelonging and alienation (section 5.3.1.5). Despite the difficulty that participants and I experienced in eliciting these narratives during the interview setting, I decided to include them for the following reasons:

1. As reminders of the difficulties, uneven power relations and indeed, feelings of unbelonging that some people experience in their family lives.
2. To illustrate the added complications that 'being gay/non-sexually normative' may lead to in traditional familial structures.
3. And most importantly, to show the evolution of pain and trauma in people's lifecycles, in this case, in regard to those who experience transnational migration. As their stories showed, migration provides the space, distance and perspective that are perhaps needed to cope and eventually live with such memories. I particularly valued the way in which they construed and shared these narratives with me; through experience, and the aid of their partners and their new circumstances, participants like Gabriella and Zach were able to find suitable personal solutions to these issues.

Hence, in a similar fashion to Goulbourne et al. (2010), Smart and Shipman (2004), and Jamieson (1998), my data provided evidence on the 'messiness' and multi-layered complexities of intimate life, and that in fact, family relationships are long standing and not easily cancellable. In relation to the other authors I just mentioned, I believe that the particularity of my research relies on the added complications that non-heterosexual identities and transnationalism add to the picture. Though Goulbourne et al (2010) do focus on the topic of transnational families, a discussion on non-heterosexuality is absent from their work.

7.3 On how to fit the 'queer' in 'transnational families'

The literature review (chapter 2, section 2.2) and data chapter 4, on transnational migration, offered material to re-think and further develop the idea of family, but specifically, the concept of transnational family. In this sense, I presented the ways in which authors like Baldassar et al. (2007) and Vuorela et al. (2002) defined this concept, while also critiquing the silence, or lack of discussion, overall, regarding sexuality, and non-heterosexuality (see section 2.2.5.3 in chapter 2). More emphatically, in chapter 4, section 4.5, I provided evidence of the different practices and emotions experienced by the participants, as they aim to sustain their relationships with their families across national borders.

As the literature discussed in section 2.2.5 of chapter 2 showed, the 'queer' subject has been slowly gaining more space in migration research. However, I still perceive a tendency in this work to see the 'queer' migrant as a 'loner', and as emotionally and materially detached from family life and commitments. In this sense, researchers like Cant (1997), Gorman-Murray (2009), and Manalansan (2004) conceptualised queer mobility as liminal spaces and journeys, in which queers break away with the past in order to explore their subjectivities and build 'families of choice' with friends and local diasporic queer communities (Weeks et

al., 2001; Weston, 1991). While this is indeed the case for many queers, especially during the past 4 decades of LGBTQ and HIV/AIDS activism, my research mostly follows the lines of that of Cantú (2009) to assert the different ways in which queers, in spite of the possible (emotional and material) difficulties, sustain networks and practices of care and 'familyhood' (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002: 3) with their parents, siblings, and other family members. This, of course does not deny the experiences of research participants who built family structures by including non-kin in that definition, but I reserve my reflections on this issue for the next subsection (7.4).

In fact, the data illustrated the complex intergenerational, cultural, and power intersections at play. In this regard, in one instance (chapter 4, section 4.5) participants Emma and Federica expressed their frustrations at not being able to be close to their ageing parents and to properly take care of them. Also, others discussed their desire to sustain their familial relationships and even to 'work at them' in cases where they were strained (see Gabriella's story in chapter 5, section 5.3.1.5), while one of the couples – Anish and Anders – described their decision to be 'discreet' with their sexuality and coupled relationship whenever they visited relatives in South Asia (chapter 4, section 4.5). This material is meaningful in terms of the insight it provides into family life and its management within transnational, intimate, culturally-diverse, and 'queer' fields. Studies like that of Goulbourne et al. (2010) and Baldassar and Merla (2013) were useful in the analysis of these issues, as they dealt with the complications brought about by transnationalism, ethnicity, globalisation, and a thorough understanding that family life is often messy, challenging, tense, unequal in terms of power relations, and also immensely frustrating.

Emotions, as practices and discourses (Svašek, 2012b), also underpinned the narratives on 'guilt' and 'power' associated with family life. By studying emotions within transnational fields, I illustrated how emotional reactions and expectations

are 'influenced by family histories, ethnic and gender identifications, and other factors' (Svašek and Skrbiš, 2007: 371). Emma and Federica's sense of guilt and responsibility toward their ageing parents is a testament of this.

The point being made is that, despite all these difficulties, or perhaps because of them, the data in chapters 4 and 5, unambiguously exposed these family ties, tensions, and commitments, proving that transnational same-sex couples 'do' family life just like anybody else – 'narratives of ordinary lives', as Heaphy et al. (2013) called them. Therefore, I would like this research to serve as a reminder of that, but also as a starting point to understand that non-heterosexuals 'on the move' actively perform and take part in family life across borders. My research is certainly not reproachful of previous research on transnational families, but I am certainly pointing out a gap in the field; thus, this realisation becoming one of the major knowledge contributions of this study. As my literature review indicated, researchers have already intersected the notion of transnational families with other issues like gender, ethnicity, emotions, and caring practices. Yet, sexuality still remains an elusive issue in area of research; this makes me wonder if this can be blamed on the still equivocal and historically tense relationship between concepts like 'queer' and family? Or, do we, as a society, still perceive queerness/non-heterosexuality as oppositional and/or threatening to family life? As a result, is all of this still subconsciously informing how research on transnational family life is carried out?

While there is no straight-forward and unique answer to these questions, I feel that is better to recognise the challenges, complexities, and new understandings of family life in the 21st Century, more so with migration and globalisation playing significant roles in this. In fact, I believe that not until 'the queer subject' is explicitly and actively connected to 'family', communities, national projects, and larger society in general, we will not achieve full equality and visibility for LGBTQs in academic research, never mind in the real world.

Beyond the relationships with kin, my data also showed that participants often considered friends and flatmates as part of what they construed as family, and this is the issue that I intend to discuss next.

7.4 On friendships

While participants displayed a heavy emotional and material investment in sustaining their relationships with kin across borders, their friendships also played an important role in their narratives. In fact, friends, a religious community (in Zach's case), and flatmates-as-friends, were often described as family; in part, distance and the need for co-presence, care and intimacy significantly influenced this. More importantly, the uncomplicated inclusion of friends-as-family serves as further evidence of how concepts such as 'families of choice', popularised back in the 1990s and 2000s by Weston (1991) and Weeks (2001) are far from irrelevant. While my research does call for an acknowledgement of the importance that these same-sex couples bestow on their relationships with their kin, it does not, however, dismiss the significant role that friendships and 'other' people at a 'local' level play in their lives. Far from this, my data, and my research in general, show the ways in which these meaningful friendships embolden and enhance family life. According to the narratives in this research, friendships at a local level are important and entirely complementary to contemporary understandings of familial life; couples like the ones in this research, find in these friendships companionship, care, love, security, and commonalities that are necessary as they go through their transnational and migratory journeys.

In line with the work of Bowlby (2011), Page and Yip (2017), Pahl (2000), Spencer and Pahl (2006), and Weeks et al (2001), my data (particularly section 5.3.2 in chapter 5) highlighted the interweaving of friendships, care, and co-presence. Likewise, the data examined the meaning of friendship in itself, considering the fact

that kin and non-kin can equally operate as friends and as family. In this sense, I examined how participants kept close physical contact with friends nearby while also sustaining long distance friendships across different countries through the use of ICTs like Skype.

Additionally, my thesis touched on the subject of couples – as intimate units – and their interaction with others, particularly in the possibility of cultivating new friendships. The data on this matter, illustrated with my interview with Ken and Martin (also section 5.3.2, in chapter 5) indicated the difficulties that people, when in coupled relationships, experience when relating to others – Martin, even arguing that ‘sometimes as a couple you’re actually much more limited in what you can do socially’. The migration component also complicates the picture further, as Ken and Martin wondered if their ‘foreignness’ added cultural and relational obstacles.

Overall, this thesis reiterates the already existent voices in the sociology of intimacy that emphasise the importance of friendships and ‘families of choice’ (see: Bowlby, 2011; Pahl, 2000; Silva and Smart, 1999; Spencer and Pahl, 2006; Weeks, 2007, and Weeks et al, 2001). However, it also problematizes this picture by arguing that transnational mobility, and being in a coupled relationship, may affect the performance and idea of friendship in substantial ways.

7.5 Dealing with uncertainty, change and legality

In regard to transnational migration, uncertainty – its overwhelming reality and its management – became an important sub-theme in this thesis. At the beginning of chapter 4 (section 4.2), I presented data that described the participants’ anxiety and distress when it came to the material and emotional instability created by migration. This data, however, was also paired with additional narratives that looked into the different ways that these couples coped, negotiated, and battled against these feelings of uncertainty and disquiet. The inclusion of material culture

in the exploration and analysis of this particular theme was noteworthy, as it helped me, and the participants, to understand how mundane/ everyday acts, performances, and 'things' became important in the management of emotions and expectations. In this sense, I discussed how a home-made map (in the case of participants Ken and Martin) (Image 3), or a yoghurt maker (in the case of Emma and Federica) (Image 6) became powerful signifiers and catalysts in these couples' lives. Indeed, while the former enabled Ken and Martin to make better sense of their own mobile history, the latter materially indicated Emma and Federica's sense of rootedness and new-found (material) stability in London.

However, achieving a sense of 'rootedness' and stability does not come easily to transnational same-sex couples. It is true that a few factors made the process easier for these particular couples, in the sense that they were all, more or less, economically privileged, and that they all enjoyed a secure legal standing in their countries of residence. Nevertheless, the narratives in section 4.3 of chapter 4, also illustrated the challenges posed as immigrants and non-heterosexuals. Participants were often caught up in difficult positions, as they tried to figure out 'what to do' in order to remain together; Ashlee and Helen, for instance, had little choice but to get into a civil partnership in order to be in a sustainable coupled relationship. Equally, their story was important in the way it revealed how states categorically regulate marriage, and more so when one of the partners in the couple is foreign. Immigration and marriage laws change rapidly and unexpectedly in countries like the UK (where most participants in this research resided), thus exacerbating feelings of uncertainty for transnational couples, and pushing them to make rushed decisions in order to stay together.

As I completed this thesis, the UK was also in the process of formally leaving the European Union, and I started to wonder about the consequences of that for some of the couples in this research. Currently, UK citizens and settled residents applying to bring a non-EEA (European Economic Area) to the country must meet a

minimum requirement income of £18,600 per year, so it is important to reflect on how this would affect transnational couples if a similar policy is followed towards European citizens after Brexit. Also, the threshold reveals the economic importance and meaning that the UK Governments assigns to marriage, therefore unashamedly creating obstacles for UK citizens and settled residents to get into relationships with non-nationals.

Though the participants in this research were mostly middle-class, therefore escaping the possible economic hardships posed by the policy described in the last paragraph, my data still gives evidence of the emotional, and significant material and time-related investments that transnational same-sex partners engaged with in order to remain together. In this sense, I hope that the data in this thesis can add to the debate, in the sense that, while the economic factor is indeed immense and unavoidable, rarely do policy makers and researchers take emotions, feelings, and personal commitments into consideration. Immigration is usually read in terms of its economic and political signifiers and consequences, while the lived experience and very humanity of immigrants (their emotions and personal lives, specifically), is brushed aside, thus, ignoring important analyses of how relationships and love, even, act as push and pull factors in migration (on this particular matter see Gorman-Murray, 2009).

But besides the data on transnational migration, the narratives included in chapters 5 and 6 also illustrated the participants' high levels of anxiety and uncertainty regarding home and intimate life. In this sense, section 6.2.3, in chapter 6, exposed the participants' ideals in relation to home; these narratives were particularly interesting as they often reflected the tensions between reality and fantasy; what was possible and what was largely, unfeasible. Similarly, chapter 5, broadly speaking, examined the pressures, frustrations, and yearnings of intimate life 'here' and 'there', as participants maneuvered their personal commitments and responsibilities with family members and friends across time and space. Thus,

these issues exacerbated the couples' already existent anxieties and uncertainties in regard to their circumstances – where to live, when to stop migrating, how to sustain their familial commitments, or how should the ideal home look like... They were all pressing *leitmotifs* in the participants' narratives, and perhaps of their daily lives.

7.6 Local migrations and translocality

I believe my research is unique in the way it looks at how transnational same-sex partners engage with local individuals and networks, their neighbourhoods, and even how they migrate to and from urban and rural environments. As a result, I consider my analyses and findings relevant in the area of human geographies, as I illustrated the different ways in which participants interacted with different domestic, local, transnational spaces, while also offering data in terms of how these couples valued and experienced places like the physical home, cities, and the countryside. Specifically, I discussed how the choice of neighbourhoods was often strategic to the creation of 'stable', comfortable and 'homely' environments; how interacting with locals or participating in local activities, such as pub quizzes became important activities in order to create a sense of belonging and familiarity, and finally, how migrating to rural areas posed some challenges but also new ways of living and reconceptualising queer lives outside of urban spaces.

Hence, while contributing to the study of queer lives in transnationalism, my study also hopes to initiate more research on how queer individuals, couples, and groups, engage with others in their local, regional and 'immobile' everyday lives. Indeed, I believe, as previously argued by Brickell and Datta (2011), Smith (2001), and Smith and Guarnizo (1998), that such local-local, local-regional interactions and movements are essential to understanding transnational migration overall. 'Situatenedness', becomes a key word here, as it is in the participants' particular

contexts, and across different locales that I came to see a more comprehensive picture of the different spaces and fields that actually make up and sustain transnational migration. The couples in this research relied on friendships, places, and spaces for social interaction – whether that referred to markets, religious sites, pubs, or venues for political discussion – for the chance to meet and network with like-minded individuals and communities for local support and personal development. Indeed, these ‘micro-processes’ in people’s daily lives, as Brickell and Datta (2011: 5) called them, provide insight into how ‘globalization is experienced by social actors’ (Brickell and Datta, 2011: 5). In chapter 4, section 4.4, for example, I discussed the difficulties experienced not only by queer migrants as they arrive to a new city (participant Wojtek, in that case), but also the anxieties that migration in itself creates among locals, as both sides are confronted with new ‘strange encounters’ (Ahmed, 2000) restructured by new systems of inequalities and opportunities (Manalansan, 2004). Additionally, this data also spoke to the literature on emotions and migration, highlighting what emotions ‘do’ (Ahmed, 2004: 4) in those strange encounters in a globalised, yet vastly unequal, world.

Thus, by paying attention to these local processes, my work confirms and extends previous research on the sexuality of migration and queer migration that focuses on the importance of local grassroots and networks. The work of Cantú (2009), which I discussed in the literature review chapter, stressed the role of individual and community-based links for the exercise and development of transnational processes – finding shelter, food, emotional support, or work. For the same reason, my research pays attention to the potential and dynamism of intimate relationships at a local level, and their power in sustaining transnationalism and fostering homely and familial environments.

7.7 Home and queerness, an unlikely pair?

In the book *Queer Domesticities*, Cook (2014: 3) stated that queers have had an ambiguous and complex relationship with 'the home', and how their 'undomesticated passions' (Cook, 2014: 3), were often conceived as threats to the ideas and values underpinning this term; indeed, historically speaking, queerness has often been thought about as incompatible with ideas associated with family and homeliness. Nevertheless, Cook (2014), and this research, have provided empirical evidence arguing that in spite of discursive claims on the alleged incompatibility between queer life and 'home', queer men and women have been manifestly active in familial and home-like structures and practices. But along Cook (2014), and other researchers like Gorman-Murray (2006, 2007, 2008) and Potvin (2014), who also studied 'queer homes and domestic culture', this thesis provided empirical data and analysis of the ways in which non-heterosexual men and women, like the same-sex couples in this research, construed, performed and used home; thus, subverting the negative connotations associated with 'queers doing home'.

That said, the negativity imbued in the association between queerness and home also comes from the other side of the spectrum, that is, from queer academics themselves. In this sense, Gorman-Murray (2006, 2007, 2008) and Fortier (2001, 2003) pointed out the pessimistic attitudes present in areas like geography of sexuality and gay and lesbian studies in relation to the home, since they have often posited the family home as a site of heteronormative oppression and surveillance (Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2007). In response to these attitudes, my research offered empirical data demonstrating the ambivalences, different attachments, practices, and importance that same-sex partners have in relation to home.

Moreover, while keeping sexuality in the picture, this study also offered an additional dimension of complexity by inserting transnational migration into the

picture. Hence, the ideas of 'the queer home' and 'the transnational home' were incorporated into each other, thus, producing a rather unique and multifaceted entity of analysis. In this way, my empirical work adds to the existing but rather insufficient scholarship inquiring on the intersections on home, transnational migration, and queer identities (see, for example: Fortier, 2001, 2003; Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009; Weston, 1995; and Blunt and Dowling, 2006, as discussed in chapters 3 and 5). Additionally, it is relevant to mention that as I finished writing this thesis, in mid-2017, I attended an international conference on home and migration, and unsurprisingly, I was the only scholar engaging with non-sexuality and LGBTQ issues, in general. This, of course, enforced my convictions about the necessity of research like mine in migration and home studies.

Specifically, my chapter on home (chapter 6), was divided into two sections: the first one, analysing the participants' 'ideas' around the concept of home, and the latter one, focusing on their actual doings, performances and uses of home. This division proved to be methodically rewarding, as I was able to capture the desires, attachments, appraisals and even frustrations around 'home'. In this sense, and as in Mallett's (2004) literature review on the concept, home proved to be a rather complicated, multi-layered, and perhaps fully unattainable 'thing'.

In this regard, the idealisation of home underpinned some of the data of this chapter (section 6.2.3), nonetheless, and interestingly, not only in terms of the future. In fact, along the way, participants sustained and discussed their ideas of home in reference to their own previous experiences of home, explicitly, their childhood homes. Examples of this were evident in the material culture narratives around food and children's books (sections 6.3.3 and 6.3.1 of chapter 6, respectively). Indeed, materiality was a pivotal tool for the analysis of these complex interactions between home and childhood home nostalgia. Notably, those past experiences of home were not always positive, as Anish's story indicated. Indeed, in spite of the decorative purposes that they served, his African masks

(image 40, in section 6.3.2.2 of chapter 6) were a reminder of unhappy and uncomfortable place-based childhood memories.

In short, I consider that in dissecting these different issues, this research purposefully contributes to the study of queer mobility and home in at least three different ways: 1) Firstly, by discussing empirical data on the way transnational same-sex couples construe, idealise, and 'do' home, I managed to disrupt the heteronormative associations that traditionally underpin the concept of home. 2) Secondly, the data also destabilised fixed and narrow understandings of the concept of home; while participants valued the material realities of home ('the house as home'), their narratives also give evidence of the multifaceted and multidimensional constructions and uses of home. Indeed, their experience within transnational migration have shaped their expectations and understandings of this concept in meaningful ways. 3) And finally, along with authors like Fortier (2001, 2003), I provided empirical data that support a more comprehensive and constructive view on the relationship between queer identities and home; certainly, my data both recognises the positive and the negative connotations that the participants in this research associated with 'home', particularly the childhood home. But instead of limiting the discussion to the heteronormative and repressive historical associations that underpin the idea of the childhood home, my research provides a more comprehensive and dynamic depiction of the way same-sex couples construed, remembered, experienced, exercised and idealised this notion.

Finally, I consider that my analyses on the transnational queer home provide material to not only support and invigorate the already existing work on the geographies of sex and sexuality, but to also instigate research in other directions, like in the study of love and other emotions. Like Johnston and Longhurst (2010: 50), I agree that '[g]eographers are used to researching sex and sexuality but not many have explored notions of love in relation to place'. Some of my empirical data, particularly in chapters 5 and 6, discussed how through domestic material

culture (and acts around it), participants nurtured and sustained their coupled relationships. Likewise, some objects and spaces at the home denoted their relationships with family members and friends, and/or even sometimes, as negative, or positive memories. Suitably, I dedicate the next section of this conclusion to how love (narratives, doings, and readings of) informed, underpinned, and invigorated this research project.

7.8 “What’s love got to do with it?”

‘Love’ was an important matter throughout this study. The narratives discussed in the empirical chapters (4-6) included stories of the participants migrating for love, ‘staying’ because of love, experiencing ‘distant love’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2014) and even expressing love and care towards each other through materiality (gifts, décor, and home improvements). However, love was not limited to the coupled units only, as I also examined the many ways in which transnational same-sex partners sustained relationships and connections with ‘other’ loved ones such as relatives and friends across different geographical locations. Undeniably, my thesis aimed to capture the different intimate and personal scales in the lives of transnational same-sex relationships, and by doing so, the focus was not only directed at couple intimacy, but at intimacy in a broader scale, including close friends and family. This exercise allowed me to understand how different referents, memories, and ideals in relation to love underpinned the participants’ stories on intimacy, migration, and home.

In this sense, I opened chapter 6, for example, arguing that memories and recurrent doings of love functioned as the key foundations of the participants’ ‘home-making practices’ and ideals around home. To arrive at this, I found May’s (2011) understanding of ‘love’, which he construed as something closely related to ontological rootedness and belonging, as crucial for comprehending the

participants' 'homing' practices (Boccagni, 2017); in other words, I understood how narratives and aspirations on coupled love led participants to idealise and practice 'home' in particular ways. Also, the participants' love-attachments to friends and family members, as well as their personal memories in relation to the childhood home and the homeland nurtured their idea of what makes up a 'homely home' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006).

In this sense, theories on affect and emotions were also pivotal for my appraisal on the ways participants construed and practiced home-building and 'affective place-making' (Rinquest and Fataar, 2016). In chapter 6, section 6.3, I provided different analyses of how transnational same-sex couples performed domestic life and engaged in various practices of 'owning' and 'designing' home. Eventually, this data has led me to argue that these 'homing' practices (Boccagni, 2017) are heavily underpinned and recreated through the participants' individual and coupled interpretation(s) of their cultural, class, and place-specific discourses around home, family, and domesticity.

Overall, my research speaks to, and adds depth to, existing works which study the intimate and 'loving' dimensions within contemporary patterns of transnational migration and globalisation (See: Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2014; Goulbourne et al., 2010; King-O'Riain, 2016; Mai and King, 2009). Indeed, I feel that my work sustains and advocates for the emotional turn in migration research that authors like Boccagni and Baldassar (2015), Luibhéid (2004, 2008), Mai and King (2009), and Skrbiš (2008) have campaigned for. In fact, the narratives in this research confirm what Mai and King (2009: 296) had to say in regards to love and migration:

'Love, whether it is for a partner, lover or friend, or for a child, parents or other kin, is so often a key factor in the desire and the decision to move to a place where one's feelings,

ambitions and expectations – emotional, sexual, economic, hedonistic etc. – can be lived more fully and freely.'

But moreover, this thesis puts same-sex partners, and their practices around love, at the heart of the project. Previously, only a few studies, like that of Gorman-Murray (2009), King-O'Riain (2016) or Mai and King (2009), studied how love shaped queer migration. What is more, it also provided layers of complexity in the intersections of love and transnational migration, discussing how identity, social networks, ideas, and practices of home, memory, sense of belonging, and place informed the participants' aspirations and everyday performances of love.

7.9 Reflections on class and cultural capital

As I stressed in the methodology chapter (chapter 3, section 1), the participant couples in this research are identified as 'privileged migrants', in the sense that they migrated voluntarily, and also possessed capital of different kinds in order to move abroad and exercise transnationalism in particular ways. Indeed, the social class dimension was evident throughout my thesis; participants, and their accounts, were deeply informed by middle-class values and it is important to reflect about this.

To start with, I would like to focus on the participants' ability and decision to move. In most cases, the couples in this research moved because as students or professionals, and with the sufficient financial means to do so. Though in the first section of chapter 4 participants discuss the anxieties and stress experienced as a consequence of the uncertainties of migration, I cannot help but to argue that their emotional worries in relation to migration are markers of their status as 'privileged migrants'. Indeed, their concerns and needs are undoubtedly different from those experienced by other kind of migrants, say, asylum seekers, refugees, or exiles. By saying this, I do not mean to argue that refugees or asylum seekers do not reflect

before or while migrating, but that certainly, the needs and pressures of the circumstances are of a different nature. In this way, it is useful to think about what Threadgold and Nilan (2009: 47) claim, in the sense that '[t]he capacity for reflexive negotiation of future risks, both real and perceived, has become another form of what Bourdieu calls embodied cultural capital – which remains inequitably distributed along class lines'.

Furthermore, in choosing to migrate, the transnational same-sex couples in this study took the risk to confront uncertainty and possible adversity along the way. Being more or less middle-class, financially able, with social networks at their disposal, educated, and with jobs (or great possibilities to get one), the couples here were empowered and in possession of a cultural capital and a sense of ontological security (or the promise of achieving that), in a way that people at the bottom (or margins) of society do not possess. Certainly, 'being reflexive, and successfully negotiating future risks, both real and perceived, constitutes privileged cultural capital' (Threadgold and Nilan, 2009: 48).

Finally, I can argue that the concept of home, and the discussions around this concept throughout this thesis are marked by the participants' privileged status as migrants. Blunt and Dowling (2006) reminded me that often migrants around the world experience homelessness in varying degrees, whether that is because they do not feel at home, or worse, because they simply do not have a shelter over their heads, are destitute, and live on the streets. Moreover, the same-sex couples in this project all had a physical place they called 'home', even if that was a transitional home, or a home-in-progress. The narratives on home in this research not only provided an insight into how these transnational same-sex couples 'felt' about the concept of home, but indeed, how they effectively and actively carried out 'home' through daily domestic routines by decorating, improving spaces, and purchasing goods. My fieldwork after all, took place at the participants' houses or flats, and I relied on their material existence for data collection; undeniably,

studying 'domestic cultures' implies the existence of 'houses as homes' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Hollows, 2008). Appropriately, as I recognise the emphasis on the physical or material reality of 'home', I turn now in the next section to discuss the relevance and contributions of material culture (and the narratives around it) for my research, overall.

7.10 Methodological contributions: the relevance of material culture narratives.

When it comes to methodology, I consider the use of material culture narratives as the most important contribution of this research. Though not particularly ground-breaking, as this technique has been used and widely discussed by other researchers in sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies¹⁰, this thesis illustrates how working with material culture brings richness and additional depth to empirical data, as well as it provides new opportunities for creativity and interaction with research participants.

On the subject of material culture narratives, I repeatedly insisted on the merits of using and thinking through them in social research. In fact, I hope that the reader can conclude that the inclusion of this technique in my thesis provided greater analytical depth and knowledge in regard to the issues at stake. Moreover, by giving material 'things' a central role in my empirical work, I attempted to overcome sociology's obsession with interviewing as the prime source of data and move the sociological gaze towards the materiality of social life. Likewise, I meant to turn the attention to how objects, 'stuff', food, among other materiality, actually play a vital role in people's social life – guiding us, mentoring us, and even

¹⁰ See: Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2007, 2008; Hurdley, 2006; Svašek, 2012b; Tolia-Kelly, 2004; Woodward, 2001; as well as the literature review that I offer on material culture in chapter 2, section 2.5.

transforming us (Miller, 2008, 2010). Finally, I also intended to show how material culture may enhance the social analyses that we, sociology scholars perform.

Certainly, my literature review, and my empirical data most importantly, showed the capacity of material culture to elicit powerful and meaningful personal and relational narratives. Also, it provided complementary and rich readings of the participants' histories and day to day lives. On the one hand, materiality carried deep meanings related to the participants' personal identities and allowed me (and them) to investigate the depths of their coupled intimacies. In section 5.2 of chapter 5, I showed how, through a variety of domestic practices, such as design and decoration, as well as through objects – gifts, CDs and books – participants shared meaningful moments together, learned more about each other's past, asserted their identities, and created routines and intimate spaces together. In this way, this section provided substantial data exploring the depths of their intimate lives, while also exhibiting the potential of working with materiality in empirical social research.

On the other hand, my study went beyond the mere assumption that 'stuff' can only be interpreted as a sign, symbol, or representation of people. Instead, and in the same line as researchers like Gell (1998), Miller (1987, 2008, 2010), Parrott (2012) and Svašek (2007, 2012b), I state that materiality creates us, and shapes us daily. Participants in this research were substantially affected by the spaces, objects, and even music around them. These 'things' created a sense of 'being-in-the-world' (Ahmed, 2000; Mallett, 2004) for transnational same-sex couples. They also evoked comfort, as well as strong emotional reactions, attachments, and non-intentional feelings of unbelonging. Hence, the material culture narratives in this thesis support the stance arguing that objects are undeniable presences and primary agents in social life.

Alongside these matters, material culture narratives were also powerful vehicles to examine the different meanings that transnational same-sex partners associated and assigned to their mobile lives and to the notion of home. After all, materiality was at the centrepiece of both issues, and for very different reasons. Thus, the participant accounts in chapter 4 exemplified the difficult choices and special meaning that transnational migrants bestowed on material things. In this sense, I examined how mobility redefined people's relationship with material 'stuff', as it forced them to decide 'what truly mattered' and what they should and should not carry with them while on the move. Also, as most of the material culture narratives in this research illustrated, materiality functioned as a powerful signifier of memories, personal attachments, and as powerful statements of resistance towards constant displacement. In relation to the latter point for instance, I investigated in section 4.2 of chapter 4 how objects such as a yoghurt maker, maps or a Shakespeare anthology enabled participants to cope and make sense of their journeys and the uncertainty behind them.

On the other hand, material culture played a central and unavoidable role in the home and the construction of domesticity. Hence, when studying the theme of home, materiality was pivotal for eliciting interesting and useful narratives on how participants understood, and most of all, performed an idea of home. The discussions on favourite spaces at the home, or the design and decoration of home, all provided important empirical material to investigate the multi-layered nature of these phenomena.

7.11 Recommendations for future research

This study aimed to analyse how transnational same-sex couples construe, experience and perform transnational migration, intimacy and home. Naturally, my research presented certain limitations regarding the way I carried out my fieldwork,

the size of my sample, the themes of analysis that I focused on, and even the epistemological choices that I made. However, at the same time, these 'limitations' and particularities are also what made my research unique, and its contributions so meaningful. For example, its conservative sample size allowed me to reach depth in my ethnographic approach, and spend quality time with each couple. Likewise, my epistemological choices gave my research a critical and reflexive voice, that hopefully effectively communicated the issues at stake.

The arguments and conclusions that I reached here are of course not stationary or definite. On the contrary, they represent possibilities and invitations for further research in the sexuality of migration, queer domestic cultures, and the sociology of intimacy in the 21st Century. In this sense, I consider that the following themes, or issues, offer a great deal of opportunities for future development:

Firstly, since all of the interviews in this research were carried out before the Brexit referendum, it would be interesting to look into the ways Brexit may, or will, affect the feasibility and sustainability of same-sex coupled relationships between Britons and EU citizens. Indeed, some of the participant couples in this research would be affected by this change of circumstances. Unfortunately, my fieldwork with them finished in late 2015 and though I have no current knowledge on how Brexit may be affecting them, a recent conversation with a British gay woman gave me a good idea of the worries some of the participants in this research may be feeling today. The woman, who was in her mid-30s, was in a same-sex relationship with a German national. In her opinion, Brexit had brought a great deal of uncertainty and stress in her relationship, as she felt that it could threaten their capacity to stay together in the future. On the one hand, she thought that, if the spouse visa regime were to be imposed on EU nationals in the UK, they would not be able to apply for it; at the time of our conversation (March 2017) she was earning below £12,000 (a far cry from the minimum £18,600 required by the law). And, on the other hand, she was afraid that moving to Germany together would not solve their

issues either, as the Brexit process threatened to be lengthy and full of legal and material uncertainty for UK citizens as well.

Secondly, shortly before concluding the writing of this thesis, I learned that one of the couples that participated in this research had broken up. Hence, a second and interesting theme to consider would be that one of the breakup of transnational same-sex relationships. What happens after partners separate (or divorce if married)? Do partners return to their country of origin? Do they keep travelling? Or do they stay in the same location/country/town where they were living together? How are relationships with kin, friends and ex-in laws affected? How are these relationships further complicated by transnational migration and geographical distance? And finally, how is the idea of the transnational home and sense of belonging affected by a breakup? These are the questions that filled my mind after I heard the news about this couple, and are surely, interesting questions for a future research project.

Thirdly, one of the most noticeable things about this research was my decision to interview partners together only. Hence, a similar research could be carried out interviewing partners, both, together and apart, and then see how that compares to the discussions and conclusions offered in this thesis. I imagine that such research would offer more in-depth information on the romantic and sexual sides of these coupled intimacy, but more intriguingly, this approach may also elicit important data on the difficult, non-disclosing, erosive sides of coupled intimacy. As I discussed in chapter 3, one of the effects of interviewing partners together was that they not only performed for me, but also for each other, therefore limiting the available data related to the complexities, frustrations, and indiscretions of their coupled lives.

Fourthly, given the different analytical engagements with the topic of love throughout this research, I would welcome more studies that problematize the

relationship and intersections between love and contemporary migration. While my work largely advocates the need to talk more about love in a globalising world, I found that the participants in this research, as well as some available literature on the matter (See for example Gorman-Murray, 2009 or King-O'Riain, 2016) hold over-romanticized approaches in this regard. I am by no means calling for cynicism here; on the contrary, I call for a deeper and critical analysis of how post-colonial relations, global inequalities, ethnicity, technology, and unfair visa and legal controls inform and indeed define 'love migration'. And, similarly, how do romantic ideas about the West and its 'opportunities', shape people's intimate aspirations today?

Finally, while this research focused on gay and lesbian couples only, it would be relevant and timely if more research could be performed in regard to the experiences of other LGBTQs in transnational migration. Intimacy, sexuality, gender-related issues, and migration are at the core of political, social, and cultural debates today, and for this reason, understanding and expanding them becomes important and meaningful. For example, Hines (2007) and Monro (2005) argue that research on transgender people is still insufficient. While Monro's (2005) is a good starting point for the study of transgender lives and citizenship, and Hines' (2007) is certainly radical and novel in its examination of transgender practices of intimacy and care, these authors are right in arguing that there is still a lot we do not know in relation to transgender life. In relation to my project, I argue for the need to study the experiences of transgender people in transnational migration; and thus, how they live and make sense of geographical migration, the legal challenges they face along the way, their relationships with kin and non-kin, and their understandings and experiences in relation to the concept of home. This research would build on the work I have presented here, but also on the emerging research on 'trans' migration. In this sense, I highlight the work of Cotten (2012), Haritaworn (2012), Lewis (2012) and Vogel (2009) as they explored the

intersections and complexities of transgender life in movement, travel, placedness, belonging, diaspora, and even sex work.

In all, I believe my research project has provided innovative and unique analytical tools for the study of contemporary intimate life, transnational migration, belonging and conceptions of home. The narratives analysed in here upheld the importance of emotions, memory, sexuality, age, gender, material culture, cultural background, and nationality into the different experiences and understandings of the issues discussed throughout these pages. I hope that by placing personal relationships and feelings at the centre of this research, I have contributed in showing a more humane and comprehensive picture of 'queer' mobile lives today.

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