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“Engendering and embodying Love: theoretical and methodological issues”

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This period I am conducting my research on love and migration and I would like to present my theoretical and methodological approach related to body and gender. Before I go any further, I should clarify that I am using the term love to refer to the emotion of falling in love with someone. In the Greek language there is a specific word to express this emotion, erotas, which is different from agapi, which is the word we use to express our love for our friends, partners, relatives etc. The specific research investigates the gendered dimensions of migration focusing on the love stories of Albanian and Bulgarian men and women, who came to Greece as migrants and particularly lived in Volos, a city in north-eastern Greece¹. These two migrant groups were chosen for two basic reasons: first, according to statistics they

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constitute the two largest migrant communities in Greece, as well as in Volos. Secondly, and most important, these groups present very different migration patterns and therefore lend themselves to a comparative analysis. While both migration flows were the direct result of the collapse of communism, their timing, gender composition and migration systems were very different. In one case we have migrant men and women from Albania with men predominating in number especially at the beginning of 1990s. After 1997, there was an important increase of family reunifications as a result of the first immigration law in Greece. In the second case of Bulgarian migrants, women predominate. They usually migrate alone, living their families back in the country of origin. Some of them are already divorced, or in the process of doing so and in Greece most of them work as live-in caregivers of elderly. I claim that these main differences between the two groups depict different gender ideologies in the country of origin and the different ways in which they experienced migration and love in Greece.

First of all, let me explain, why I have decided to study the phenomena of migration through an emotion, and particularly the emotion of love. Placing love at the heart of the migration study my aim is to approach migrants not only as mobile workers, but as gendered, emotional beings, who have desires, emotions and want to express, or denied the means to express, their sexual identities. Until recently research on migration was focused on the economic aspects of this phenomena and regarded migrants as victims of the global economic system. Even though the last years there was an affective turn in migration studies, love and sexuality remain two underresearched dimensions of migration experience. I strongly believe that the narratives, the practices and understandings of love and sexuality constitute a privileged tool to explore people's experiences of cross- border mobility. That is something I realised when I was working as a researcher in a research program called "Gendered aspects of migration in South-eastern Europe", which was based at the Department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology of the University of Thessaly¹. During the fieldwork informants have shared with me their love stories. When they were talking about their criteria of choosing a partner, or they were expressing their loneliness, their frustration when they were being rejected or when they broke up with their boyfriend or girlfriend, when they were complaining about their conflicts that occurred in everyday life with the rest family members because of the different perceptions and practices of love, they actually referred implicitly to a

whole range of issues as religion, marriage strategies, working conditions, family relations, gender ideologies and values, ethnicity, migration law, racism, dominant cultural images of bodies and sexuality and at the very end of it, when informants were talking about their love affairs, they were describing their experience of migration in Greece.

During these conversations it became also clear to me that love was not a personal issue but a social, a cultural and a historical one. The study and analysis of migrants' experiences of love in the host-country as well as in the home country and of their reinterpretations of love under the given conditions of their daily lives in the host country but also in the context of their transnational mobility offers an understanding of the ways in which the emotion of love is being constructed culturally, socially and historically.

What is emotion

I base my approach on important anthropological work, which illustrated that emotions should not be regarded as pre-social, pre-ideological and pre-discursive psychological and individual states. Scholars have explored, for example, how sentiments are embedded in cultural contexts that give them meaning (Rosaldo1984); rooted in lived, positioned personal experience (Abu-Lughod1986; Rosaldo 1989); produced through social relationships (Lutz1988); articulated as discursive social practices within relations of power (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990); and experienced and expressed through embodied physical processes (Rebhun 1999). According to the above, I consider love as a cultural discourse, as a social practice and a bodily experience.

Further, the emphasis on the emotion of love will offer me the chance to explore the construction of migrants' sexual and gendered identities in a transitional "third" space, between the host country and the home country, and a transitional time between the past and the future. More specific, my aim is to study the role that love plays in the transformation of migrants' gender values, embodiment experiences and sexualities in relation to migration dynamics.

Moreover, one of my basic research questions is the right to love. Who has the right to fall in love with whom? How are specific bodies constructed as loveable and

others as hateable? The emotion of love conceals or reveals normativity and social, economical, political and embodied hierarchies. In this context the emotion of love is being connected to class, to race, to ethnicity, to gender, to Other. Love becomes the field, where power relationships are displayed and generated and strategies of resistance are being articulated.

A matter that really preoccupied me during this research is how someone study emotions;

Using this theoretical frame I could not centre only on discourses of emotions and not to take into account the social/cultural construction of non-verbally represented emotions. I didn't want to adopt a logocentric approach. So it was necessary to put in question some of the methodological and theoretical assumptions of anthropology, namely, the emphasis that anthropologists tend to put on informants' voluntary and intentional narratives articulated in the course of a planned and structured interview – an attention that often underestimates non-intentional communication between the ethnographer and her/his interlocutors. In order to study and understand non-verbally articulated, embodied and corporeal cultural perceptions of love, I use the ethnographic methodology of participant observation, which requires the participation of ethnographer in migrants everyday lives and provides the non-intentional communication with them.

In order to avoid a logocentric approach of emotion, I paid special attention to the material aspects of migrant's love focusing on the exchange of gifts, on photos they post on their Facebook accounts, spots, images, preparing food, or on the absence of material objects. Using this approach I seek to explore in which ways materiality and emotions are being interwoven. And further, I would like to locate and read the emotional flow between lovers.