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Simmel, Love and the Foreigner: Is Love Between Borders a Love Without Limits?

Abstract. *In this article, we reflect on the importance of the work of the German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel (1858-1918). We focus on reflections about love in certain mobility processes. Starting from a theoretical discussion about love in the Simmelian work, we unfold it to think about love in contexts of broader mobility. The Simmelian love, therefore, serves as an analytical basis that articulates the experiences of people in different geographical areas. Starting from the idea of frontier and limitation, we situate this analytical reflection in the contemporary pandemic context, when mobility and the lack of it also became more complex. Reflecting on love, in the midst of this sanitary crisis context, this discussion becomes extremely necessary and, in this aspect, Simmel proves to be a revealing author when it comes to the existing possibilities. His work contributes to the understanding of certain processes of interaction and mobility. In addition, we aim to review the notion of foreigner developed by Simmel, and think, to what extent, it is applicable to understand the dynamics inherent in the crossings between love and mobility. In the scenario of contemporary affective relationships, it is emphasized how much Simmel's work is still fertile to comprehend certain feelings, emotions and perspectives. In the transnational context, in which time and spaces are constantly resized through access to new information, communication technologies and possibilities for creating and maintaining diverse bonds, the Simmelian perspective can very much lead us to a better interpretive notion of love in a context of mobility and immobility.*

The tragedy of sociology for Simmel (2006: 47) is the tension between the individual and the "mass". In this article we want to reflect about the relation between individuals and society in

(in)mobility times, with something that we call "interstices", which can be moments and spaces where/when one can react to totalizing social pressures and exist in some kind of particularity. Love can be one of these possible interstices that produce something unique? Unlike other authors of his time, Simmel understood the individual as more important than the society, producing very particular perceptions, and dealing with a vast array of perspectives. Simmel's theoretical constructions helped to rethink society as more dynamic, and the metropolis as a way of existing and being in the world. Simmel thought of money as a circulating and relational object, and love as a search. His reflections contributed to the thought of interactive and sociative possibilities in their subtleties. He wrote about love, money, sex, flirtation and other unusual themes. In this article we want to emphasize that when one loves a foreigner, a stranger, or another, in this process, they can reinforce an individual's willingness, producing interstices. Loving the other is also opening itself to internal tensions and the possibility of living a life that wouldn't be the same with someone that shares the same culture and status of citizenship. Loving a foreigner can be a possibility for an open way to love. Connecting with Simmel's social theory, we want to think if love is a possible interstice when/where individuals can fully express themselves and produce something unique, even when they have to deal with social structures and pressures.

To better understand the work of George Simmel, one should know that he was the seventh child of a Jewish family converted to Protestantism and he was born in Berlin (Germany) in the end of the XIX century, more specifically in 1858. The modern Prussian city presented new things to the people: there was electricity, trains circulating, and life was faster. Amidst the city crowd, the anonymity, impersonality, and indifference characteristic of modernity were strengthened (Waizbort, 2000). As Waizbort (2000:

333) points out, "Thus, the big city becomes the place of tension between what Simmel calls quantitative individualism and qualitative individualism: both the individual who is equal and free and the individual who is different and unique". Amid the indifferent and fatigued figure of the "*blasé*" city inhabitant, Simmel also sensitized his gaze to the loving subjectivity placed in the city, demonstrating the different forms of daily interaction between individuals.

After receiving an inheritance from his tutor, Simmel became economically independent and was able to pursue an academic career (Moraes Filho, 1983). He learned Philosophy and History at the University of Berlin, where he finished his doctorate in 1881, studying Kant. Although his courses were a hit among women and Slavs (Vandenberghe, 2005) and his work had been translated into languages such as English, French and Italian, Simmel was a marginalized intellectual in German university life. Early in his career he suffered from anti-Semitism and had to work for 15 years as a voluntary professor (without receiving financial compensation from the university). It was only at the age of 56 that he managed to hold a chair in Germany. At that time, his work seemed to address issues of lesser importance for other sociologists. However, his passage and influence at the Chicago School attest to the relevance of his thoughts, especially regarding interactionist perspectives and the possibilities of observing the relationship between individuals and society in a more subtle way. As Simmel's legacy, one can note that Robert Park (1864-1944), important name not only of the Chicago School but also of the Urban Sociology, attended Simmel's courses in Berlin in 1900, and felt "deeply

influenced"[1] (Coulon, 1995: 56), especially concerning studies on the theme of the foreigner.

If we compare Simmel with the macroscopic conceptual constructions of Durkheim (1858-1917), Weber (1864-1920), or Marx (1818-1883), we can see why his work has awakened a late recognition in sociology. If we consider the concept of a social fact in Durkheim (1978)[2] and its emphasis on social coercion and a crushed individuality, we can understand how the concept of sociation was intended to be less broadly explanatory and perhaps more comprehensive. Durkheim (1978: 39) understood that "when a sociologist undertakes the exploration of any order of social facts, he must endeavor to consider them in that aspect in which they appear isolated from their individual manifestations". However, love as a feeling, even though it can be situated historically, especially romantic love, could it be understood regardless of the individualities? In contexts of mobility that are marked by borders and also take part in marking the borders with interactions and transit, how does Simmel's work inspire us? How do societies and groups influence in classifying who can be loved and how? In what

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[1] Throughout the text, we decided to translate citations written in different languages than English. All the citations use the pagination of the original publications.

[2] For Durkheim (1978: 3), who would characterize the social fact as an object of sociology, "We are, therefore, facing an order of facts that presents very special characteristics: they constitute ways of acting, thinking and feeling that are external to the individual, endowed with a power of coercion by virtue of which they impose themselves. Therefore, they could not be confused with organic phenomena, as they consist of representations and actions; nor with psychic phenomena, which exist only in and through individual consciousness. They constitute, therefore, a new species and it is to them that the qualification of social status must be given and reserved".

social terms love can happen? Highlighting some simmelian ideas we'll try to reflect about these interconnections.

According to Moraes Filho (1983), Simmel understood the subject as a social atom, and therefore, he valued the psychological motivations of life in society, as well as centered his analysis on microsociology (although he had never carried out empirical research). As Moraes Filho (1983: 29) points out, "Simmel almost always appeals to instincts, inclinations, and impulses to explain the content of the basic process of association, disregarding the social matter itself". In this sense, the complex relationship that Simmel establishes between nature and society is somewhat contradictory when we observe the use of his concepts empirically.

Sociation is one of Simmel's (1983) most important concepts and it exists when individuals who coexist separately start to interact with each other. Simmel (1983: 61) understands that it is necessary "an interest, an end, a motivation and a form or way of interaction between individuals, through which or in whose figure that content reaches social reality". Simmel (1983) thinks that there are several forms of social cohesion, which could originate or maintain a group. In this sense, Simmel (1983: 60) states that: "Neither hunger nor love, neither work nor religiosity, nor technique nor the functions and works of intelligence still constitutes sociation when they occur immediately and in their pure sense". In a sociation, there is space for individuals in tensions, conflicts, and dynamics of social life. As for the mobility processes, in which individuals are placed in different social contexts, that are new and conflicting interactive processes, Simmel's work certainly indicates other analytical possibilities, such as agency, projects, and protagonism.

Zanini (2020), in her research with Italian-Brazilians in Italy, observes how social differences can be racialized and sexualized, causing interactive processes, generally oriented by current social representations. As for women, in particular, it is observed that

Italian-Brazilians, with citizenship recognized by the *jus sanguinis* rule and proving Italian ancestry, are racialized and classified as foreigners, extra-communitariam[3] migrants, or other classifications, some of them pejorative. Zanini (2020) observes, however, that in the field of foreignness, otherness, and similarity, there are spaces for negotiation in which Italian-Brazilian women manage, in interactive processes, to create strategies to have their differences recognized (or at least respected). These strategies are related to Italian interactive codes and the understanding of the social "game" rules that exist there. It can be observed also the existence of "love games", when Brazilian women gain advantage through their sexualization. In this way, Adriana Piscitelli (2009: 110) analyses the stereotypes associated with women from countries of the Global South when they move to Europe and she understands how they are read in interactive situations. According to the author (ibidem: 112), in Italy, for instance, Brazil appears like the principal provider country of Latin American wives. In this sense, one can ask: What does conjugality between people from different societies reflect? And how mixed couples can experience love in a tensioned social space? Far from thoroughly exploring all of these questions, we think that the simmelian ideas help to think about the different dynamics that are involved in mobilities scenarios which require intersectional perspectives and a critical view about feelings, emotions, family, kinship, sexism, racialization, sexualization and docilization.

[3] By extra-communitariam is understood those who are not ideally part of the European community. It can be considered a derogatory and stigmatizing term.

In Simmel, love as a search

Society, like love, is not static for Simmel. He understands love as a force of attraction but highlights the need for opposing peers. The dualisms presented by the author, however, are not rigid, emphasizing that life in society results from both the interaction of positive and negative social forces. Vanderbergue (2005: 19) says that "It is known that, for Simmel, society exists from the moment when individuals are interacting with one another "with, for and against each other' and are aware of this connection".

> As we learn in the essay 'On Love', the experience of love cannot be explained as a consequence of more elementary phenomena or reconstructed from the concomitant interaction of such phenomena (...). As Simmel puts it, love cannot be constructed 'from a plurality of factors none of which is love itself' (Oakes, 1984: 39).

Love was a much more common theme to be dealt with by poets than by social thinkers. Simmel (1993a) warns about the few contributions of philosophers on the theme of love, such as those made by Plato (in "Phaedrus" and in "The Banquet") and "Schopenhauer's very unilateral reflections" (Simmel, 1993a: 139). Why does this happen? When thinking about this topic, Georg Simmel expresses a perspective that goes beyond the absolute individuality, with the establishment of a connection between subjects who are not merely centered and selfish, but at the same time are not altruistic to refuse themselves.

In the text "On love (a fragment)", Simmel philosophizes about the "I-you" relationship: an interaction established between individualities, mediated by the force of love. Simmel understands that sensual activity and emotional activity complement each other in such a way that "the combination of both on the conscious level of experience represents the unity from which they emanated. It is

the inner mode of being – in itself, completely indivisible – that we call love" (Oakes, 1984: 157). It is through the propensity to love that we open ourselves to the other, to interact with other individuals and we need to mediate between our subjectivity and external issues. Thus, for Simmel, "This is precisely the miracle of love. It does not nullify the being-for-itself of either the I or the Thou. On the contrary, it makes this being-for-itself into a condition under which that nullification of distance and the egoistic reversion of the existential will to itself follow" (Oakes, 1994, p. 155). Finally, those who love are prone to a greater opening of possibilities of being, interacting, and placing themselves concerning the other, in a dynamic otherness.

Our analysis is not related to a "universal human love", a "Christian love" (Simmel 1993a: 167), or platonic love, but with that of an erotic nature. Simmel (ibidem: 158) deals with "affective relationships of a loving nature" and explains them in a way that is not always clear, sometimes dancing with words and making it hard to apprehend his ideas. In this sense, "The erotic nature is perhaps the one for whom giving and taking are the same thing: it gives by taking and it takes by giving" (Simmel, 1993b:177). The aim of the erotic nature, explains Simmel (1993b: 182), is not reproduction or enjoyment, although eroticism appears "most often in the form of sexuality". In the case of romantic love in contexts of mobility, there is the formation of couples and families from different origins, in which the idea of love is incorporated into the migratory project. Likewise, in the family migratory project, the notion of family, love, and commitment can become decisive in the management of stays in "foreign" contexts (Erazo, Chitolina, 2020).

When reflecting on modern love, Simmel (1993a: 129) understands that the "object of love" as "a subjective phenomenon" is constructed by us. He links love to immortality through procreation, but he does not limit it to that love. According

to the values of that time, one was expected to have a cisheteronormative love established between a man and a woman, and it is evident in Simmel's work, since it was not common at that time to question this structure. For Simmel (1993a: 124), love is a "private product" and, therefore, it would be necessary first to exist, to be known and later loved. Specifically talking about the Brazilian context, there are many classifications for relationship statuses that provide a wealth of difficult translation to English. For example, the first stage of a relationship can be the "ficada" (something similar to a hook up, but not necessarily only sexual), which is a quick encounter, which can take place in a public environment (such as a square, cinema, bar, or nightclub) or private (at the house of any of the individuals). The "ficada" involves time spent with physical exchanges, such as kissing, caressing (or even sexual intercourse). "Ficar" (the verb) presupposes the lack of a lasting bond or even the lack of commitment to monogamy. This can be a way of getting to know someone and noticing if there is "chemistry", in other words, if there is a comfort or sexual desire between the two people. You can "ficar" with more than one person at the same time or alternately, in different periods, according to mutual interest. The lack of definition of this status helps the people involved to have more freedom to justify their actions (or the lack of them)[4].

As for dating (namoro, in Portuguese), it is understood as a phase in which there is a formal/social bond established between the two people, based on the assumption of monogamy. Furthermore, dating often involves getting to know the families, as

[4] In this same sense, it is possible to point out the use of the expression "crush", an expression commonly used in social networks and which can be a synonym of "ficante", someone with whom one flirts, for whom one is interested or feels attracted to.

well as public participation in activities and statuses like "boyfriend" and "girlfriend". In dating, the meetings are more frequent and one can even reflect on the next steps, such as engagement, marriage, or the institution of a stable relationship. We emphasize that, although there are other marital agreements and forms of relationship (such as Free Relationships, open relationships, swing, etc.), this text does not intend to expand this discussion (we will stick to the more conventional classifications), that's so we suggest reading Kessler (2013) for more information about Free Relationships in Brazil (RLis).

Both the marriage and the common-law marriage are contracts signed with the State, documented, aiming to generate legal certainty, with obligations and rights for the people involved. The difference in Brazil refers mainly to the change in marital status, as, after marriage, the marital status is changed from "single" to "married". Still, it can be highlighted that marriage is only possible between a couple (and only since 2011 same-sex marriage has been allowed). "The status of 'married', 'separated', 'single', 'spinster', 'girlfriend', 'affair' lends meaning to the constitution of a project in the context of effective and sexual relationships; this project can become public, depending on the degree of social acceptance" (Alves, 2008: 277).

In the context of mobility and international migration in Brazil, for reasons of citizenship recognition, marriage is also seen as an alternative for a documented stay in Brazilian lands. Marriage between Brazilians and immigrants can be legally recognized, however, when different race/ethnicity, class, and generation are in place, even if a marriage happens legally, this might not be recognized in everyday life. There are also, in the Brazilian context, a series of stigmas related to relationships that escape the rules of the predictable, as same-sex relationships or the ones that are related to people from different economical and educational backgrounds.

The formalization of relationships is also observed in several countries, and there are even strategies aiming at the "legalized" permanence in the destination countries through this means. With or without love, in the Simmelian sense, relationships and their shaping play a very important role in the migratory contexts.

Simmel, individuals, societies, otherness and mobilities

In a seven-page essay about people who come from foreign places, Simmel (1983: 182) carries out a psycho-sociological analysis of the foreigner as "a person who arrives today and stays tomorrow", settling with a particular space group of which initially he/she/they was not part of. The foreigner is a liminal figure, who not only mediates between two worlds but also imports and exports ideas, habits, etc. When establishing a relation between love and interaction, one is talking about proximity and distance. These factors are also important for us to conclude that foreigners can establish distance interactions and that the approximation process involves not only geographical distances but also aspects that would be shared with other human groups. That is,

> The foreigner is close to the extent that we feel common traits of a social, national, occupational, or generically human nature between them and us. It is distant insofar as these common traits extend beyond them or us, and link us only because they link so many people (Simmel, 1983: 186).

The foreigner is usually a category constructed from narratives and imaginaries. It becomes more real only when physically entering that territory. However, in a globalized world, a variety of information concerning distant geographic portions reaches us every day. Websites about tourism, television programs, news, articles, all this collection of information help to build a certain

vision about territory and the people who live there and their particularities. About the stranger in the simmelian point of view:

> What matters, however, is not geographic or geometric space, but 'psychological forces', 'spiritual factors', which bring people and groups closer together, unite, distanciate, or separate people and groups. The *foreigner* is one of the most characteristic examples presented by Simmel, and the most extensively developed by him (Moraes Filho, 1983: 24, author's italic).

Differently from the love analyzed by Simmel (1993a), in today's society, the interaction between subjects is mediated by Informational Communication Technologies (ICTs), which facilitate contact between people who can be physically distant. Love can, therefore, be built from narratives elaborated on the experiences. The initial encounter may not take place physically but through a discursive construction or images. During the period of distancing, it is possible to select what was experienced, what will be shared with the other person, through a very particular perspective. This means that unpleasant facts can be suppressed and existential conditions can be "retouched". As well as the photo filters that "beautify" or accentuate aesthetic characteristics or make adjustments to what is socially expected. Therefore, the exchange established by the use of technologies can be modified to create a different scenario from the one experienced, adapting reality to the image you want to transmit. In this way: thinking about love in contemporary times, in Simmel words, we could say that:

> Our self is the truly productive and autonomous instance, it reaches its full expression in morality and love, its demands are the ideal forms of its being, which it has left to fill with its reality; or else the latter belong to a metaphysical realm, from which our self is the irradiation, if it is not, perhaps, just the domiciled stranger (Simmel 1993b: 191).

In 1908, Simmel reflected (2002: 385) about writing and letters, in a text published in Austria. It can also help us to think about the exchanges promoted by the use of new communication technologies, when using the written language:

> As an immediate personification of exchange, each participant in a relationship gives the other more than the mere content of their words; therefore, as each observes the other, they are immersed in an unspoken sphere of feelings, experiencing an endless possibility of nuances in the tone, rhythm, and emphasis of their expression. The logic or the intended content of your words experience an enrichment and a modification for which the letter offers only extremely simple analogies; and precisely this logic or intended content, on the whole, is developed through the memory of direct personal contact between correspondents. Which becomes, simultaneously, the advantage and the disadvantage of the letter (Simmel, 2002: 385).

If society is an abstraction (Simmel, 2006: 8), "indispensable for practical purposes", love is a search, possible and desired. As a useful abstraction for a "temporary synthesis of phenomena" (ibidem), it is not a real object that would exist beyond "individual beings and the processes they experience" (ibidem). In this sense, thinking of mobilities as experience is a necessary exercise, as they are intersected by trajectories of beings with bodies, historicity, and subjectivities, so migration can be considered as a total social fact (Sayad, 1998). Understanding this abstraction that crosses borders is especially important when the individuals who transpass these limits are also constituted by their bodies, historicities, subjectivities, sexualities, and a specific worldview. How do individuals experience

this abstraction and how does it affect their existence when they are seen and treated like foreigners?[5]

Both conscious and unconscious forces affect social life according to Simmel's perception. Considering the relevance of a psychologization of social life, love relationships also enter the context of conflicts, tensions, and interactive adjustments proposed by the author. Simmel writes that:

> Strictly speaking, neither hunger, nor love, nor work, nor religiosity, nor technology, nor the functions and results of intelligence are social. They are social factors only when they transform the mere aggregate of isolated individuals into specific forms of being with and towards one another – forms that are grouped under the general concept of interaction (Simmel, 1983: 166).

However, how does it work in contexts of mobility? The sociability allowed to foreigners, those who are in a place other than their own, can be limited. Also, their interactions and their possibilities of living love as a search can be controlled, restricted to the contexts in which they can circulate and to the possible sociabilities. How could love arise between foreigners, beings who

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[5] Simmel (2006:40) emphasizes that, "The individual is pressured, from all sides, by contradictory feelings, impulses and thoughts, and in no way would he know how to decide with internal security between his various possibilities of behavior – let alone with objective certainty. Social groups, on the other hand, even if they frequently change their orientations of action, would be convinced, at every moment and without hesitation, of a certain orientation, thus progressing continuously; above all, they would always know who they should take as an enemy and who they should consider a friend".

are part of different social contexts? For Simmel (2006: 46), "Differentiation from other beings is what encourages and largely determines our activity. We need to observe the differences of others if we want to use them and take the place adapting among them". In this sense, love can be interpreted as an approach in which "these interests, whether sensual or ideal, temporary or lasting, conscious or unconscious, causal or teleological, also form the basis of human societies" (Simmel, 1983: 166). In other words, it is possible to interact and connect, despite the differences. But it is not an easy thing when we look at the mobility scenarios.

Therefore, how can one think about Simmel, love, and mobility? Allowing an open interpretation of the author's ideas, it can be understood as if each "individuality felt its meaning only in opposition to the others, to the point that this opposition is artificially created where it did not exist before" (Simmel, 2006: 46-47). In this conflict, tension, and adjustments, love can appear as a search because there is space for freedom and negotiation. So, how to equate individual desires with collective pressures, especially concerning the love that generates social bonds, parenting, conjugalities, and family ties that dialogue with the harshest institutions and social structures in societies? As for the game between individuality and "the mass", the coercive social norms, Simmel says that,

> This is one of the purest and most revealing strictly sociological phenomena: the individual feels overwhelmed by the 'mood' of the mass as if assaulted by a violent external force that is indifferent to their being and desires– and yet the mass consists only of these individuals. Its interaction, pure and simple, develops a dynamic which, due to its magnitude, appears as something objective that hides its particular contribution from each of the participants. Each individual also snatches away at the same time that he has snatched away (Simmel, 2006: 53).

In this rapture, love as a search is formalized in recognized and recognizable interactive processes, since "in its totality, man is, so to speak, a dynamic complex of ideas, forces, and possibilities" (Simmel, 1983: 171). Considering these possibilities, love as a search becomes possible, even among different and differentiated ones. As Simmel points out, erotic matters happen through the logic of offering and refusing, that is, a game too. In this sense, the conversation established between migrants and foreigners can be complex, and it is necessary for sociability and social games. Understanding the rules of these games and being able to place oneself in it as an individual to be recognized is, of course, one of the challenges of interactions between alterities.

When the migrant does not dominate the cultural codes of the destination society, neither the language nor the interactive languages, how can love be processed, manifested, and experienced? How can the foreigner love and be loved, considering their social condition when their position "is determined, essentially, by the fact that it has not belonged to them from the beginning, by the fact that they have introduced qualities that did not and could not originate in the group itself"? (Simmel, 1983:186). Considering Simmel's reflections (1983: 185), it is emphasized that the foreigner "is freer, practically and theoretically; and examines conditions with less bias; his criteria for this are more general and more objectively ideal; they are not tied to their actions by habit, piety or precedent". Could they, in this way, love more freely, without the restrictions of the surrounding social cohesion? Could they play interactively and with more autonomy and freedom? Simmel (1983: 186) points out that,

> In this sense, a trace of being a foreigner easily penetrates even the most intimate relationships. At the stage of first passion, erotic relationships energetically reject any idea of

> generalization: lovers think that there has never been a love like theirs; that nothing can compare, neither to the loved one nor to the feelings for that person.

Love, in the sense of a search, is also related to the destiny that is formalized in social constructions and in their games, in which the tension between individual and society, between individuality and freedom, between sociation and autonomy, is dynamically processed. Love, in this way, undergoes the same dynamics, whether between foreigners or not. One can think, as Vertovec (2007, 2011) points out, how much cultural issues are politically important and can, nowadays, also be conceived as power relations. This power is also highlighted by Trouillot (2001) in relation to how the State and its ramifications act in people's daily lives. Insofar as the State, its border controls and mobilities distinguish between who is a citizen or not, who is a foreigner or not, love also seeks to be in tune with these apparatuses and bureaucracies. Therefore, Piscitelli (2009) shows that mixed couples (thinking here especially in mobilities contexts) have special dynamics, whether in relation to everyday experiences, access to documentation and also to family contexts.

In Simmel's reflections on borders, we can see how much this is a dear topic for the author, in the limits between individualities and society. The author asks:

> Where, however, is the boundary between the essential construction of the foreigner soul and this permissible psychological indiscretion? This precarious material boundary nevertheless only means the boundary between two spheres of personality, between two privacies, and it establishes the consciousness that cannot cover the sphere of the other beyond a certain limit, beginning of the inviolable sphere of the other, and of revelations which he must personally and fully dispose of (Simmel, 2020: 409).

In these figurations, tragically, a partial subject can appear, someone with rights and duties that are partial due to the lack of belonging. When we draw attention to Simmel's thoughts to think about foreigners, migrants, refugees, and other categories in mobility or immobility, it is important to pay attention to his words about borders, when the author emphasizes that the sociological meaning "deeper than the border or from the delimitation of belonging, however, lies in the fact that the more exact certainty of the relationships, in the last case, gives it a more objective character than it has in the first" (Simmel, 2010: 412).

Thus, living love as a search, in affective relationships in contemporary contexts, also implies understanding the dynamics of these borders, these belongings, in their objective and subjective forms, in the scope it has for life in society, and also for everyday choices and practices in different times and spaces. After all, the question about "who you are" starts to make sense in interaction contexts, whether real or virtual.

Transnationalism, love as a search, and immobility during the Pandemic times

By transnationalism, we understand, according to GlicK-Schiller et al (1992), the possibility of individuals being part, at the same time, of two (or more) specific national worlds, that of the country of origin and that of the country of destination. We can also think of the transit of individuals, whether migrants, refugees, expatriates, or other categories. The establishment of social bonds can take place in many ways, such as keeping family ties, affinities, and other forms of coexistence and sharing. This "being there" and "being here", in the contemporary context, is facilitated by new communication technologies, which allow the sharing of time in the virtual space. As highlighted by Glick-Schiller and Fouron (1997),

the maintenance of these transnational experiences can also take place through the sending of remittances and everything associated with them (care, affection, reciprocity, solidarity, among other elements). We cannot forget, equally, an entire care market that accompanies contemporary mobilities and the important role of an idea of love. Although this is not our focus in this article, as we are dealing with love between couples, it is also important to think about how much, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2012: 26) point out, "Love and care thus become 'merchandises' that autochthonous women delegate to others, it is exported and imported". In researches in the Italian scenario, with Brazilian (Piscitelli, 2009; Zanini, 2020) and Mexican women (Sabugal, 2019), academic authors reinforce the necessity of incorporate cleavage like gender, race, generation or class when we speak about love, marriage market, sexualization, racialization, family, "dreams" as well as understand the identification process.

In contemporary capitalism, one has to think about how much consumption dialogues and also interferes in "social games", in the possible mercantilization (cultural, symbolic, erotic, among others) of interactions and the possibilities of sharing. For love to become possible and feasible, you have to put yourself in an interactive game. In the words of Illouz (2011: 118), "The process of describing oneself is based on the cultural scripts of the desirable personality". But, how to know what would be desirable in mobility contexts? What do partners look for in relationships they call "love"? What about conflicts, so important in the Simmelian perspective, what is the role that they would play in a love experienced in the difference? How would they interfere in the search for the share between the "I" and the "you"?

If relationships in virtual environments were strengthened, however, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, love, in the Simmelian sense, had to be experienced in different manners. In this sense,

Illouz (2007, 2009, 2011) emphasizes that new dynamics arise in cybernetic times. The search for partners is favored by mastering the rules and possibilities of "virtual sociabilities", for example. This new space of relationships in which "love" can be experienced produces aesthetics, formats, and new configurations about the body, sexualities, perceptions, senses, and eroticism.

According to Illouz (2020: np), the coronavirus has carried out important transformations in the way we interact in the world, and "Their most comforting gestures - the handshake, the kisses, the hugs, the shared food - became sources of danger and anguish". The initial anguish of not knowing the ways of transmission or prevention, as well as the lack of knowledge about a possible infection of the other person, influenced the interactions, as the virus could be transmitted even days before the symptoms of Covid-19 started. According to the author, the ideas of intimacy and contact were revised, even making it possible to consider as an act of love the action of respecting people's desire to isolate themselves, to feel more protected, and to avoid contagion. Sociability, more than ever, is being achieved through the use of social networks. As Illouz highlights (2020: n.p.), "I have no doubt that in the post-coronavirus world virtual and long-distance life will take a flight of its own, now that we have been forced to discover its potential".

The pandemic led people to consider and manage risk in relationships, especially those with close contact and in closed spaces. This has had a huge impact on transnational relationships, whether between couples, families, or other groups. People needed to control not only their care, but the commitment of others in relation to sanitary measures. Close people who used to attend environments with crowds or who did not make the proper use of masks and hand sanitizer could be turned down. No wonder, we also saw several cases of couples, especially in the health sector, who decided to live in separate houses, so that the other person would

prevent them from becoming infected. When thinking about contexts of international mobility, respecting physical distance, more than an option, turned out to be a restriction imposed by the sanitary surveillance of national States. Thus, face-to-face social games that used to allow pleasant sociability between individuals were limited, especially when it comes to eating and drinking together. As Simmel points out: "the oldest functions and, spiritually speaking, the emptiest, are the means of meeting - often the only one - that provides the connection between people and more heterogeneous circles" (Simmel, 2006: 49).

The pandemic affected erotic-love relationships, either because living together undermined the relationship or because confinement became a stressor that was not considered before. The excess of coexistence and the loss of privacy, in many cases, generated conflicts and led to the desire to dissolve relationships. According to the Colégio Notarial do Brasil – Seção São Paulo (2021), the number of divorces in the second half of 2020 was 15% higher than in the previous year. It is difficult to quantify this scenario in transnational and mobility contexts, as there are relationships between citizens of different national states, with different citizenships, which are not even formalized legally, remaining informal and even in the distance, sometimes, between comings and goings. In this sense, one could ask how these relationships are maintained.

According to Du Bois (1983: 20) "Love is not premised on doubt and testing, but is based on belief, trust, and faith: love is always a risk". In this sense, we must remember that fidelity in love became an object of reflection for Simmel in an article published in a newspaper in Berlin, in 1908. For him, in the dynamics of social life:

> Fidelity now, in the sense discussed here, has the meaning that the personal and oscillating inner life adopts, under this, in turn,

> in fact, a fixed character, a stable form of relationship. Or vice versa, sociological solidity, beyond immediate life, actually seems to seek its subjective rhythms and is directed towards the content of subjective life, that is, of an emotionally determined life. (Simmel, 2003: 519).

How can we think about love and fidelity in times of sanitary crisis and immobility? What are the meanings that Simmelian love assumes in these contexts of pandemics and restrictions, lack of presence or confinement, with long journeys of conviviality or long absences, when differences and conflicts can become non-negotiable? It is noticeable that, although there is physical immobility when the borders are closed, the bonds remain intertwined, especially for those couples or families who unexpectedly found themselves in national states that very quickly decided that no one could leave or enter the country, without people having prepared for that. The tensions and stress generated by the pandemic certainly interfered in the experience of many romantic relationships. In addition to mobility and immobility, what remains? What is the love that arises, stays, or fades away in the new dynamics required during the pandemic? What particular kind of love is sought in a pandemic?

Social distancing was experienced to the extreme by couples who had relationships in different countries. Some of these nations comply with strict sanitary vigilance over human mobility. According to Paiva (2020), Brazil was the third country (behind the United States and Germany) with the largest number of couples separated in different countries during the pandemic and that joined a campaign called "Love is Not Tourism". This campaign requested the release of travel for couples impeded by restrictive measures imposed by governments, aiming to minimize the impacts caused by this forced distancing. It was a form of activism forwarded via

social virtual platforms such as *Facebook* and *Instagram*. On these platforms, there are reports of couples and families who, separated by borders and by the pandemic, wished to be together to experience "love". Turning "Love is not tourism" into virtual activism is precisely to highlight the existence of feelings that are processed in mobilities, especially the feelings of "love". And, reflexively, on these borders, many reflections arise, especially about foreignness, sociation, conflicts, and sociability. Also, there are many questions surrounding the limits of freedom and individuality, themes that were important to Simmel. In a survey, prepared by "Love is not tourism Brazil", it was found that "intercultural heteronormative couples represent 96% of the total group members and homo-affective, 4%" (Gonçalves, 2021: 1). Among the nationalities of intercultural relationships, the Italian would be in first place, with 26%, the French, with 14.73%, the Portuguese, 13.18%, the German, 12.40%, and the English with 9.3% (ibidem: 2). Activists in this virtual movement understand that love and family cannot be classified in the same category as "tourism", that is, entertainment or something transitory and unstable. The mobilization was positive, allowing intercultural couples from different countries, who justified the "bonds" in their relationships, to cross the sanitary and geographic borders imposed by Covid-19. This is an event that, with certainty, could be interpreted in the Simmelian logic of love as a search for the individual who has wills, desires, and the capacity to tension the given social formations. And, perhaps, we would say, the limits imposed, whether they are sanitary or not.

Love can't be understood without the individualities and the structural mechanisms that interfere on it. Within and outside the borders, Simmel's work inspires us to understand the interactions and the transit of individuals, their willingness and the ways they deal with social structures and pressures. The historical and epistemological questions are important, and they allow us to better

understand how the interactions may happen and how subjects can be together even in circumstances that are not imagined, as a pandemy. The classifications of who is desired/accepted in a society vary and influence how one can be welcomed and even though state measures can prevent major risks (as a bigger contamination), they also influence the way people are interacting (or not) with their loved ones. The social terms on how love can happen are negotiated with other subjects and also with the social structures, as informed by the research of Girona (2007) about transnational couples. Love can be manifested in several ways, but when related to mixed marriages, for example, the lenses that allow this love to grow, can influence its duration.

Final considerations

This brief article sought to highlight the relevance of Simmel's work to reflect on issues that are still so complex and rich for social analyses, especially love. Speaking about the current crisis, one can understand that love between foreigners has been influenced by the scenarios of mobility, immobility, pandemic, reinterpreting interactive processes in contemporary contexts. We seek to emphasize how the theme of love, in its various forms of expression and possibilities, can be interpreted in the light of a theory as alive as Simmel's. Individualities, experienced in transnationalism and border tensions, whether social or geographical, can be interpreted through Simmelian reflections. We can emphasize that in a romantic relationship with a stranger, individuals can experience a different way to love, experiencing the interstices beyond the social conventions. To love a stranger, an "other", can be a way to love your own difference. Can this be an open door for resistance, agency and individuality? Mobility process and their studies can help us to think about these dynamics.

In the first section of our article, we pointed out how much of Simmel's intellectual trajectory and his particular way of dealing with social issues were relevant and well-founded. This sociology of subtleties, with a certain interdisciplinary touch, dialoguing with history, philosophy and psychology, allows its perspectives to be fruitful. We entered into the issue of foreignness, difference, borders, individualities, and the important concept of sociation, which allows us to glimpse the social dynamics in tension. Understanding conflicts and dynamics as they are interactively processed was a legacy made possible by the Simmelian construction of the individual and social relationships. This perspective was richly explored by different generations of the Chicago School. Simmel reflections on subcutaneous levels of social life are important and have inspired empirical research, especially when we look at unquantifiable elements and rationalities.

Concerning mobility processes, we intended to carry out an interpretive exercise with some contemporary examples of the experience of love, at a distance or in proximity. We are thinking about love in times of pandemic, presenting the virtual activism of the "Love is not tourism" movement, which has sought to facilitate the experience of relationships beyond the controls of geographic and sanitary borders. This kind of activism and manifestation of forces based on love experience and feelings can be understood in a simmelian point of view, like social plays, tension and a space for individual demands too. In short, this article is an instigating and fruitful exercise that allows us to emphasize how the Simmelian perspective is enriching for thinking about certain social and interactive dynamics and questioning the limits of love and its expressions, considering here the tension always present between the individual and the social. Is love a interstice in this tension, an interstice where individuals can break some social pressures? In the mobilities contexts it can be understood checking other elements, like the "matrimonial market" (Piscitelli, 2009), the generational

questions, gender, class, racial, etnhical, religious, sexual orientation and other social markers (Brah, 2006). Finally, love can be a pleasant form of resistance to socially defined hierarchies and places, speccialy in mobilities contexts.

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