Imaginations, Desires and Fantasies of Togetherness
The Negotiation of Relationships through Physical and Digital Visiting Friends and Relatives Mobilities

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PhD Thesis
Abstract

Imaginations, Desires and Fantasies of Togetherness: The Negotiation of Relationships through Physical and Digital Visiting Friends and Relatives Mobilities

While research into different forms of migrant co-presence has grown across mobilities, tourism and migration studies, conceptualization of the social relations underpinning co-presence has been underdeveloped. While the literature thus far has been significant, because analysis has been somewhat over-determined by binary thinking of tradition versus loss, and grounded in difference, conceptualization has been rather de-attached from the everyday lives of informants. Physical and digital VFR (visiting friends and relatives) have been viewed through a continuum – on one side there is a rosy, unshaken view of the social that has privileged ethnic norms and analytical separations of kinship and friendship and moral and market relations. On the other, more pessimistic side, the social is equated to high reflexivity, individualization and market influence, resulting in the dissolution of traditional kin and kith obligations and reinforcing analytical divisions of co-presence as divided between a consumer oriented affluent north and un-reflexive ethnic south. The middle ground, while highly adept, nonetheless offers a sort of cheery pessimism that tends to implicitly confirm individualization while also suggesting informants partly succumb to normative principles.

This thesis moves away from the moral and instead focuses on the relational ethics of digital and physical co-presence within the trans-local personal communities of highly skilled Italian migrants in London. This thesis employs a multi-sited ethnography, drawing from 41 interviews carried out with migrants in London and with their friends and family abroad. The thesis finds informants are not necessarily guided by unconscious ethno-national normativity or seeking to destroy tradition but that migration and tourism are modes of care for the self used to re-imagine selves and socialites within intersecting life course moments that fosters situated forms of obligation. With some relationships, co-presence is driven by a fantasy of wholeness, a shared imagined and affective optimism for solid intimacy that drives the trans-local co-development of life-projects, leading to a common sense of belonging articulated through co-embodied rhythms of ICTs and VFR. With other relationships, the fantasy turns to cruel optimism - rhythms of ICTs and VFR simultaneously construct hope for solid intimacy while continually highlighting divergent life courses and developing a sense of un-belonging. Lastly, the thesis equates responsibility to temperature, as a by-product of friction, to help highlight how the production and management of friction is crucial to understanding the ontological politics and relational ethics that heats and sustains some relations while cooling others. The study demonstrates that globalization and mobility do not simply concern outside forces articulating various degrees of stability and loss to ethno-national tradition but that social and cultural change are also generated from the inter-subjective imaginations, fantasies and desires of individual migrant/non-migrant subjects attempting to re-envision togetherness within particular life course moments.

Keywords: Migration; Identity/Belonging; Mobilities; Co-presence; Globalization; Affect; Ethics; Kinship and Friendship
Statement of Originality

This thesis and the work to which it refers are the results of my own efforts. Any ideas, data, images or text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work and attributed to their originator in the text, bibliography or in footnotes. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other academic degree or professional qualification. I agree that the University has the right to submit my work to the plagiarism detection service TurnitinUK for originality checks. Whether or not drafts have been so-assessed, the University reserves the right to require an electronic version of the final document (as submitted) for assessment as above.

Signature: _________________________________

Date: 20 November, 2017
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background on Research and Physical VFR

For many, whether on the move or not, keeping in touch with friends and family who live in distant or not so distant locations is a regular feature of daily life. Keeping in touch with friends and family across multiple locations through both information and communication technology (ICTs) and visiting friends and relatives (VFR) mobilities have been an important part of my own migrant mobility and have informed my research interests over the past several years. Since I migrated to Europe from the US, keeping in touch has involved regularly crisscrossing between Italy, the USA and different migration contexts, with several friends and family following suit, and the use of multiple digital platforms that range from scheduled Skype conversations, to messaging apps and following people on Facebook. This lived reality raised questions that have significantly informed my research interests. Questions involving broader issues, such as why do people go to great lengths to migrate from certain contexts only to go to equally great lengths to maintain contact with those contexts after migration? How do different levels of relative privilege configure desires and capacities to keep in touch? Why do certain relationships develop to a greater extent after migration than others? Does regular circulating contact blur distinctions between the familiar and the strange? What does digital contact, like receiving pictures, from loved ones abroad while participating in daily activities like commuting do to you in your daily life?

Indeed, this thesis builds on a previous ethnographic project, inspired by several of these questions, which investigated the embodied and interpretive identity politics behind visits from friends and family to migration contexts leading to the blurring of distinctions between insider and outsider, tourist and migrant (Humbracht, 2015). Similar to that project, while this thesis is focused on shifting personal relationships post-migration moments, it is not grounded exclusively within migration studies or a single social science discipline. This thesis takes an inter-disciplinary approach that employs and discusses literature from tourism, tourism-migration, migration and mobilities research that draw mostly from Human Geography, Anthropology/Ethnology and Sociology. The aim is to foster a creative tension between literatures that benefit from the strengths of each research area while avoiding their pitfalls.
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(discussed below). In parallel, this thesis views migration as a form of mobility constructed with and through multiple mobilities, such as tourism and digital communication (Sheller & Urry, 2006). However, the thesis does not subscribe to any particular theoretical model on mobility, such as the new mobilities paradigm (ibid). Rather, it aligns with recent efforts at understanding how intersecting mobilities, like those of migration and keeping in touch, are made meaningful through the negotiation of social relations in everyday life (Cresswell, 2006).

In order to begin narrowing the field of inquiry on migration and keeping in touch, the thesis will begin by examining some of the literature on physical VFR. A crucial starting point is the recognition that despite the high volume and worldwide impact of VFR, the subject has garnered relatively little attention from academia (Griffin, 2012). VFR research grew to a limited extent in the nineteen nineties (Jackson, 1990) by beginning to question the neglect of VFR and positioning it in relation to tourism and migration studies. Since then, a considerable amount of VFR research has focused on economic impacts, as well as ethnic and gender identities. The myriad social relations, however, carried out across varying scales and their entwinement with kinship and friendship has largely been neglected. In addition, the early studies in particular were empirically oriented instead of offering conceptual tools (Janta, Cohen, & Williams, 2015) that might have helped to point in new directions for research into VFR. Thus, while the scale and importance of VFR is growing, there is still little theoretical progress in understanding the vast range of issues, particularly with regard to social relations embroiled within the phenomenon (Griffin, 2012).

A large part of research into VFR from tourism studies has focused on economics. The term VFR itself is rooted in marketing segmentation that has helped frame VFR as a fundamentally economic phenomena (Munoz, Griffin, & Humbracht, 2017). This form of research set out to analyse social relations through different motivations, activities and duration of stay. In doing so, however, the literature sought to position VFR as an economic component of tourism worthy of study (Backer, 2012; Braulinch & Nadkarni, 1995; King, 1994). These motivations led to research which sought to challenge perceptions of the economic insignificance of VFR by mapping aspects like consumer expenditures, hotel accommodation and the scale and volume of VFR (Backer, 2007; Backer & King, 2015; Lehto, et al., 2001). From this body of research, VFR has been positioned as a tool for economic development followed by articulating

This has led to rather market oriented discussions of kinship and friendship. Scholars have argued for a need to disaggregate friends from family in order to improve marketing segmentation (Backer, 2007; Moscardo, et al., 2000; Seaton, 1994; Seaton & Tagg, 1995). The basis of this argument is built from mostly quantitative analyses examining frequency, length of stay, activities, and expenditure. This framework has provided a highly normative picture of kinship and friendship, as demonstrated in a recent edited volume on VFR, stating that a “VF (visiting friends) traveller acts more like the common idea of tourist than the VR (visiting relative) who, it could be said by following an obligatory ritual that is more person directed and less place centered” (Seaton & Tie, 2015). The authors suggest that during visits, families generally spend more time at home, come more often, travel with other family members, and spend less. These arguments are said to reveal that kinship in VFR is based on kin obligations, suggesting that kinship is an immutable category and subjects have relatively low degrees of agency in determining relationships. The statistical analysis used in this work simultaneously shows that friendship is a social relation that is flexible, has a low degree of obligation and is more consumption orientated. Importantly, though, there is surprisingly little engagement with the vast amount of literature crossing multiple disciplines on kinship and friendship. Thus, while relevant research makes an important contribution, there is a particularly high risk that previous research is oversimplifying complex processes, painting an overly rosy picture of social relations, and replicating implicit normative assumptions about kinship and friendship to further marketing initiatives. Moreover, there is little discussion of contextual factors related to the cause of migration and globalization, and how those factors might justify or not a division of kinship and friendship. Therefore, there is a need for a qualitative examination of the division (or not) between kinship and friendship and in parallel to academic literature of these research areas.

While the above research was important in calling attention to VFR, nonetheless, until recently, it remained largely at the periphery of migration and tourism studies with the social relations of VFR remaining even more unexamined. The lack of interest in VFR could be attributed to the pace and scale at which academia destabilized essentialist, bounded or static notions of place. With the inception of the state, social relations were said to happen in insulated
communities that resulted from the panopticon governing gaze of state institutions (Foucault, Rabinow, Rose, & Foucault, 2003). These communities were said to send and receive tourists and migrants through push and pull factors (Cresswell, 2010) whose significance was also conceptualized as happening in place. Thus, the growing interest in VFR is linked to the stabilisation of theoretical meta-narratives on mobility that has sought to take seriously not only the social relations embedded within places but also the on-going and fluid movements between places (Cresswell, 2006; Urry, 2007). These theories have helped to highlight the extent to which the production of the local is synced with the production of the global (Appadurai, 1996), place is no longer (but probably never was) entirely centred on roots, but routes (Clifford, 1997), and the resulting need for understanding social relations beyond societies (Urry, 2000) that are blurring borders of culture and economy (Lash & Urry, 1994).

With the growing recognition of the importance of these issues, VFR was re-positioned from the borders of academic inquiry in parallel to an increased focus on intersecting forms of mobility. VFR was first linked to globalization and relations of production and consumption that blur borders between migration and tourism (Hall & Williams, 2002). This body of research provided fruitful investigation, in part, into how VFR is an ‘enfolded mobility’ (Williams, 2009) that is both produced by and producing tourism and migration. In this way, VFR was linked to increasing and diverse forms of mobilities, such as lifestyle migration (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009) or second home ownership (Muller, 2002). Thus, migration was re-conceptualized, in part, not as a one-off event, but as also potentially involving more temporary mobilities. In addition, migration was viewed as circular, where tourism could lead to different forms of migration, like retirement migration.

Furthermore, migration can also lead to tourism. A large amount of research, mostly from migration studies, has also focused on return visits and their role in diasporas and renewing ethnic identities, diverse forms of heritage or roots tourism and exploring the potentialities of return migration (Basu, 2004; (Carling & Erdal, 2014) Conway, Potter and Bernard, 2009; Duval, 2004; Duval; 2004; Duval, 2003; Baldassar, 1997, 2007; Muggeridge and Dona 2006; Sagmo, 2014). There has also been important work on visits of second-generation migrants to ancestral homelands, either in preparation for return migration or exploring how memories of previous visits construct the situated identities of second-generation migrants after return (King,
Christou, & Teerling, 2011; King & Vathi, 2011). Thus, visits are to a certain extent ‘search spaces’, where temporary and often touristic visits create the potential for further mobility (Hall & Williams, 2002). This research has been important in highlighting the intertwining of tourism and migration, and the on-going and fluid nature of contemporary migration, particularly regarding the negotiation of potential future migration. Lastly, additional research has also demonstrated that VFR is a means to improve both migration and tourism. This entails creating initiatives that are simultaneously socially inclusive to migrants and used to develop city tourism industries through the engagement of migrant hosts (Griffin, 2013; Humbracht, 2015) and also for using VFR as a sustainable national resource in developing countries (Young, Corsun, & Baloglu, 2007).

A critical problem, however, within this literature has been a tendency to conceptualize visits by migrants from the Global North as tourism and those from the global south as ethnic transnational engagement (Humbracht, 2015; O’Dell, 2004; von Koppenfels, Mulholland, & Ryan, 2015). There is of course a growing amount of research beginning to address this issue, for instance from mobilities studies looking at coordinating face-to-face meetings of working professionals in Britain (Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2008). In addition, tourism studies has begun to address this issue (Backer, 2012; Backer & King, 2015) by arguing that two crucial aspects for developing VFR research are viewing tourism consumption and cultural meanings of relationships in separation and seeking out more international perspectives on VFR. In addition, von Koppenfels et al. (2015) demonstrated in migration studies that return visits involve balancing obligation for contact, cultural transference and leisure practices. These issues, however, are linked to the rooted discursive ethos of tourism and migration studies that have tended to subject the affluent to the gaze of tourism and those from the global south to the lens of transnational migration and care (Humbracht, 2015; O’Dell, 2004). Therefore, this thesis is aimed at building on a previous study (Humbracht, 2015) that has attempted to address these issues and the general gap in the VFR literature on the intertwining of social relationships of kinship and friendship, and tourism practices of affluent migrants. Practices of social relationships and tourism in VFR are enmeshed and blurred together with other practices of care provision, affirmations of identities and roots, and maintenance of territorial rights (Janta et al, 2015). This blurring, or lack of blurring, may no doubt cross lines of ethnicity, north/south, class,
gender, sexuality and variety of cultural categories. One aspect of this thesis, therefore, will be to help shed light on the processes behind the blurring of practices.

The tourism-migration and migration literature has also helped point towards the role VFR plays in fostering hybrid and contingent forms of subjectivity situated between the exotic and extraordinary. In this vein, a crucial area of research that has remained unexplored though, is the connection between ICT’s (information and communication technology) and VFR. As research into globalization has become more pervasive, scholars have called for greater attention to the on-going links and development of social relations and subjectivities through both ICTs and VFR after migration moments. The importance for such research has been heard in tourism (Backer & King, 2015; Shani, 2016), migration (Baldassar, 2008, 2016; Baldassar & Gabaccia, 2011; Fortunati, Perttierra, & Vincent, 2012) and mobility studies (Cronin, 2014; Elliott & Urry, 2010; Humbracht, 2015; Janta et al., 2015; Walsh, 2009). Considering the pervasive distribution of multiple and expanding forms of digital communication, a range of key questions remains under-researched. Most poignantly, how various combinations of ICT and VFR re-shape the situatedness of migrants and friends and family leading to altered trajectories of mobility and immobility.

Based on this brief account of the VFR literature, the thesis argues that there is a general lack of research into the social relations imbricated in VFR. This thesis has identified four interconnected threads related to the lack of research into social relations that requires unpacking in relation to the existing literature: 1) the normative durability of kinship and friendship in light of globalization and supposed need for separation; 2) the intersection of consumer tourism/leisure and cultural meanings of kinships and friendship, 3) how this intersection relates to affluent and voluntary forms of migration; and 4) the interconnection between VFR, ICTs and forms of subjectivity.

1.2 Ethical Imaginations of Co-Presence

In tying these themes together, a starting point is to problematize academic discourses that have situated migration, social relations and digital and physical VFR along traditional lines of the consumer oriented affluent global north and disadvantaged ethnic global south. The thesis follows, in part, migrations scholars (Baldassar, 2007b; von Koppenfels et al., 2015; Walsh, 2009) who have researched the physical VFR visits of highly skilled migrants, demonstrating
that affluent forms of migration are informed by visits constructed through multiple practices and forms of relations, such as leisure, care, commitment and emotional attachment. In this vein, the thesis examines the manner in which relationships, identities and belongings that shape togetherness, are constructed through the discursive and embodied dimensions of physical and digital VFR practices, as enacted between young Italian highly skilled migrants in London and their friends and family living abroad. Togetherness, in this thesis, is defined simply as socialities. The focus on fluid socialites and not fixed ‘societies,’ reflects the more global, dynamic, context specific, and relational character of contemporary social relations (Long & Moore, 2013a).

While the thesis focuses on Italians, it departs from previous studies by attempting to move beyond the ethnic lens (Glick Schiller, Caglar, & Gulbrandsen, 2006). The motivation, here, stems from recognizing that understandings of social relations and culture within globalization theory has been somewhat over-determined by analysis focused on difference, linked to binary thinking of, for instance, tradition/loss, power/resistance, insider/outside, obedience/freedom, and macro/micro, that have impeded theory by continually returning to various degrees of nostalgic pessimism (Moore, 2011). In addition, by often replicating binary analysis grounded in values espoused by academics themselves, academic conceptualization has sometimes struggled to maintain proximity to the everyday lives of informants (ibid). Indeed, the literature on migration and keeping in touch has often been configured along a continuum that views social relations through an uncritical optimism on the one side and pessimism on the other side, and that has struggled to represent informant’s everyday lives.

Thus, the thesis seeks to avoid a rosy picture of highly skilled migration and social relations embedded in VFR as depicted by some tourism research. While kin norms may lead to ICT contact and VFR visits/frequencies and inform the construction of obligation, clearly, relationships in daily life are about more than simply following the rules. Instead, relationships are more ambiguous, fluid, context specific and political than described in the tourism literature (Humbracht, 2015). More attention is needed to how VFR and ICT contact is a matter of the negotiation of expectations from reflexive agents within specific contexts. Furthermore, contrary to the arguments for dividing kinship and friendship, consumer practice and cultural norms, because of shifting social relations from globalization (Giddens, 1992), examining keeping in touch offers an opportunity to compare notions of kinship and friendship that may be blurring.
Thus, there is an overall need to further understand how shifting social relations contribute to generating affluent forms of migration, blurring meanings of kinship, friendship and consumer practice.

This thesis also, however, attempts to avoid a prominent conceptualization of affluent western migration, termed lifestyle migration. When viewed through this lens, affluent migration is attributed to meanings of autonomy and nomadism, and developed in a context of social individualization (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), aesthetic reflexivity (Lash & Urry, 1994) and the dissolution of kin authority/obligation (Giddens, 1992). When paired with a tendency in the literature to view the VFR visits of the affluent as spaces for tourism and not transnational relations (von Koppenfels et al., 2015), scholarship discursively reinforces arguments that increased mobility and ICTs are producing shallow, fragmented, and ephemeral socialities, increasingly driven by a consumerist market logic (Bauman, 2003). These discourses also dynamically reinforce the notion that the mobility of migrants from the global south and east lacks agency, is highly structured by global economic chains and that visits for these groups are oriented towards transnationalism, care and renewing ethnic identities and not leisure or a sense of adventure (von Koppenfels et al., 2015). Again, here, viewing relationships according to simplistic dichotomies where affluent migration is free from obligation and governed by consumer pleasure, does not reflect the everyday lives of migrants (Baldassar, 2007b; Walsh, 2009).

Lastly, the thesis also moves away from an emerging middle ground, attempting to resist individualization. In part, this work has sought to understand the manner in which relationships are constructed both through performing or doing relationships (Morgan, 2011) and durable kin and kith norms. Emerging mostly within migration studies, the literature has argued for the continued relevance of structure and agency that has thus informed research on intersections of ethnicity, gender, class and age (Baldassar, 1997, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2016; Baldassar & Gabaccia, 2011; Botterill, 2013; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Parrenas, 2005; Zontini, 2014) and focused heavily on care practices and co-presence as different forms of kin-work. This work has been crucial in demonstrating that transnationalism is developed and sustained indeed because ‘there remains much normativity in transnational families’, while also highlighting intra-family power dynamics incurring processes of exclusion (Reynolds & Zontini, 2013). While this thesis does not argue against the validity of this work, indeed, it suggests further research should be
done in this area. It is nonetheless important to make theoretical space that does not only equate continuity and change to structure and agency. This work has tended to articulate informant accounts as modified formations of normative obedience that depicts informants as reflexive, yet somewhat incognizant dupes – these understandings can overshadow informant desires and capacities at transforming their lives that may also include more inter-subjective formations of obligation and commitment.

In addition, work in the middle ground has tended to both implicitly and explicitly embrace the pessimism inherent in individualization. For instance, while research on co-presence from within mobilities studies has been vital in setting out the different dimensions of co-presence and in demonstrating shifts in the temporal and spatial mechanics of relations as a distance (Elliott & Urry, 2010; Larsen, 2008; Larsen, J. Urry, & Axhausen, 2006b; Urry, 2007), this work has also contributed to reinforcing individualization by focusing on the dyadic relations of extended social networks (Holdsworth, 2013). In addition, ironically, some work (Madianou & Miller, 2011) that has sought to demonstrate the durability of norms, has conversely concluded that migrant mobility and ICTs do in fact foster teleological processes of democratization of kinship. Therefore, this thesis argues that despite the ardent efforts of scholars, the middle ground remains over-inflected with nostalgia, leaves crucial areas of everyday life under-theorized and, nonetheless, partially embraces the pessimism of individualization, commodification and democratization.

This research study strives to move beyond binary thinking that might trap analysis to an analytical spectrum based on the continued importance of normative social relations on one side or assume their dissolution on the other. It argues for more focus on the micro-level, inter-subjective and relational dynamics that produces attachments in the everyday lives of migrants. To flesh out these dynamics, this thesis draws on Henrietta Moore’s work on sociality and her notion of the ethical imagination. To avoid focusing on structural forms of difference and conceptualizations locked into analysis between obedience and transgression or tradition and freedom that have come to dominate theory on globalization, Moore (2011) combines Foucault’s later work on ethics with more recent insight from affect and performance theory to help delineate a non-dialectical and non-teleological theory of globalization. Her approach does not focus on ethics per se, but aims at understanding the forms and means through which individuals imagine relationships with themselves and with others that lead to novel ways of approaching
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social transformation (Moore, 2011). Thus, the thesis helps shed light on how working professional migrants use migration and practices of keeping in touch not to destroy tradition or simply follow the rules, but as a means to develop the self by re-imagining relationships both within migration contexts and those close relationships at a distance. Importantly, crucial to re-imagining relationships is fantasy, affect and performance. This thesis argues that informants’ insistence on the continued importance of relations, yet their strident efforts at re-making those relations, should not be viewed in contradiction. These accounts do not necessarily equate to abstract normative structures, but an aspirational form of normativity (Berlant, 2011) or the manner in which keeping in touch constructs a sensed potential for solid forms of intimacy that then acts as a kinaesthetic force for re-thinking relationships. This focus entails moving beyond structure and agency and towards an ‘art of the living,’ that reveals how migrants articulate personal aesthetics of self through how they establish relations with certain important relationships. Importantly, affect is not read as a nostalgia for relationships or roots (Coles & Timothy, 2004), but optimism for re-constituting past and present relationships within certain life course moments.

Furthermore, while the study does concentrate on Italians, the aim is not to research trans-national or ethnic dimensions of relationships, but the intimate relations of trans-local personal communities. Personal communities are sets of relationships that an individual finds important at any given moment of their life course (Spencer & Pahl, 2006); that can range from parents, siblings, school friends, or co-workers to friends related to hobbies. By focusing on personal communities, the research helps highlight how projects of self are articulated, linked to and co-developed to a greater extent with some relationships more than others. Moreover, these connections cross a variety of relationship boundaries from the local and non-local to friend and relative. While fantasies and desires for re-making relationships are a part of all key relationships, they are also distributed unevenly. Relationships that do encounter difficulties, do not necessarily reflect the dissolution of the social, but alternative trajectories of self within particular life course moments that are connected to other key relationships, like a spouse, that forge alternative connections to the global. Thus, the uneven development of personal communities aids in further discussing individualization and liquid modernity by revealing the highly relational and inter-subjective manner in which informants struggle to actualize selves and self-other relations, using combinations of ICTs, tourism, migration, kinship and friendship.
1.3 Overview of the Thesis and Research Aims and Objectives

In order to give the reader a picture of how the thesis will build the above argument, an overview of the thesis is provided in this section. While the research question and aims draw explicitly from the literature review chapters, to help guide the reader they are also described here.

The thesis will begin by providing some of the general implications for understanding social relations, migration and affluent forms of migration in light of intensifying processes of globalization. Chapter two argues that scholars who view affluent migration as a form of nomadic mobility have underestimated the structural implications shaping affluent migration. The thesis goes on, however, to demonstrate that literature that has emphasized the re-construction of social structure, has nonetheless been highly influenced by theory on individualization and democratization. This understanding provides the groundwork for positioning the importance of VFR and ICT’s, and the construction of obligations and forms of intimacy and belonging that configure emerging forms of sociality. Thus, the chapter ends by beginning to sketch the implications for viewing highly skilled migration and practices of digital and physical VFR with loved ones at a distance in relation to the ethical imagination.

In order to deepen the discussion on expectations and obligations, chapter three positions physical and digital VFR in relation to the long and rich literature on kinship and friendship. The chapter begins with a general review of kinship and friendship as they have been articulated in classic literatures in sociology, anthropology and philosophy. In regard to kinship, I draw on both structuralist accounts of kinship and the work of Pierre Bourdieu to establish the importance of practices in understanding how meanings of kinship are structured, yet changed through different forms of agency. In reviewing friendship, chapter two goes from Aristotle to Derrida, to understand friendship as a gendered voluntary bond guided by implicit politics for the possibility of enemy or intimacy. From there, friendship is linked to globalization, and arguments of individualization and post-traditional forms of intimacy, where it is argued that in light of globalization, the borders of kinship and friendship need to be further discussed. The chapter concludes that kin and non-kin obligations need to be understood within personal communities that construct ethical imaginations through performative politics that blurs kinship and friendship at different moments of the life course.
Chapter four begins to build on the previous chapters by setting out the implications for migrant personal communities in relation to literature on intimacy and belonging. The chapter begins by attempting to manage arguments put forth by Bauman on the commercialization of social relations, while articulating the importance of the extraordinary and the exotic. This situates the study within a general field of rising importance on research into intimacy, emotion and affect. The thesis then goes on to position the research in relation to work on trans-local intimacy and belonging. The chapter concludes by arguing that further research is required into belonging and the trans-local normalization of rhythms of co-presence and the manner in which they are constructed through transformations of self-other relations.

Chapter five outlines the research methodology, beginning with the research question and subsequent research aims:

**How are ethical imaginations of togetherness constituted from the manner in which migrants and friends and family utilize ICT and VFR practices for constructing relationships?**

1. To understand the extent to which key relationships within personal communities participate in ICT and VFR practices.
2. To understand how participation in trans-local socialities changes in different contexts of the life course.
3. To understand how different forms of commitment between friends and family are constructed in relation to ethical imaginations of self.
4. To understand how the constitution of ethical selves through self-other relations is linked to fantasies of belonging.
5. To understand how rhythms of ICTs and VFR constitute forms of intimacy as belonging.

From there, the chapter creates a framework for an interpretivist epistemology and ontology that underpin the methodology. The chapter then explains the approach to investigating togetherness - that is to employ an understanding of the social and cultural, based on Foucault’s notion of care for the self (Foucault, 1986) and performative practice, embedded within mobilities studies. The following section details the research strategy used, namely a multi-sited ethnography, and the research techniques built into this strategy. The end of chapter five and the
first findings chapter, chapter six, are designed to link into each other. Chapter five ends with a description of the analysis process and key themes that emerged from fieldwork. Chapter six builds on the analysis section by offering a descriptive overview of key informants and key issues from the research and some details on their personal communities in order to better guide the reader through the findings chapters.

Findings chapters seven and eight are intimately linked. Both chapters conceptualize different elements of continuity and change that underpin relationships and in relation to the intersecting themes of intimacy and identity/belonging that emerged during the fieldwork. Chapter seven argues that migrants use migration as a means of self-development and self-actualization. A crucial mode for developing self is through different forms of co-presence with key local and non-local relationships that leads to a fantasy of wholeness - a shared imagined and affective optimism for solid intimacy that drives the trans-local co-development of life-projects, leading to a common sense of belonging articulated through co-embodied rhythms of ICTs and VFR. Chapter eight describes how the fantasy of wholeness turns to relations of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011). The thesis argues that rhythms of ICTs and VFR simultaneously construct hope for solid intimacy while continually highlighting divergent life courses and developing a sense of un-belonging. In addition, instead of viewing social relations through a lens of pessimism, the chapter argues that cruel optimism is in fact a crucial mode through which relationships are sustained and nonetheless provide informants with hope and ontological bearing.

In the final findings chapter, the thesis equates responsibility to temperature, as a byproduct of friction, to help highlight how the production and management of friction is crucial to understanding the ontological politics and relational ethics that heats and sustains some relations while cooling others. Thus, this chapter helps articulate an alternative view of difference that does not rely on ethnicity, class or gender, but instead demonstrates how an extensive variety of subject positions take on more or less importance within highly situated and inter-subjective life-course matrices. This point is reinforced in the conclusion of the thesis that also helps clarify how research objectives were met, as well as identifying some of the limitations of the study.
2 Digital and Physical VFR: Towards Sociality as Ethical Imagination

2.1 Introduction

The increased mobility of people, whether tourists, migrants, business travellers, backpackers, or commuters and their ability to stay connected on the move with media and communication technology is one of the key factors defining modern subjects (Appadurai, 1996; Duncan, Cohen, & Thulemark, 2014; Elliott & Urry, 2010). Migrants make up almost a billion of the world’s population, who, together with the rise of broadband societies, are provoking rapid political, economic and cultural transformation (Fortunati et al., 2012). Furthermore, for many migrants, but certainly not all, the expansion of air travel, particularly low-cost air travel in Europe, has enabled the possibility for many to not only ‘stay in touch’ with friends and relatives electronically, but also with frequent physical visits. Social networks are extended, maintained, created and recreated using ICTs and visiting friends and relatives mobilities.

For many who have migrated, VFR and ICT’s are the two most important means for sustaining relationships. The intertwinement of the virtual mobilities of ICT’s and the physical mobilities of VFR have become for many the principle mediums through which family and friends negotiate relations; yet, there is still very little research investigating the link between the two (Janta et al., 2013). The intersection of electronic media and VFR mobilities stands to offer significant theoretical contribution to the constitution of togetherness. Implicit to this form of sociality, is the potential for advancing theoretical knowledge of proximity and distance, reconfigurations of time, space and subjectivity, and expressions of different forms of agency. In addition, juxtaposing these topics together also creates the potential to explore blurring borders of the everyday and the exotic, alterity and familiarity, tourism and migration, kinship and friendship. The aim of this section is to provide a background to VFR and ICT’s, delineate some of the key theoretical problems that arise from an intersection of the two, and offer a research agenda for approaching these problems.

2.2 Socialites of Affluent Migrant Mobility

2.2.1 Affluent Migration and Individualization

As described in the introduction, the thesis aims to examine the relationships linked to highly skilled migrants, as a form of relative affluent migration, in order to problematize the link between different forms of migration and intersecting meanings attached to those relationships.
Drawing from von Koppenfels et al. (2015), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission the thesis defines highly skilled migrants as those who have either successfully completed a tertiary education and/or are employed in occupational roles normally requiring such qualifications.

One of the more prominent conceptualizations of affluent migration has been through lifestyle (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Fountain & Hall, 2002; McIntyre, 2014). Lifestyle migration is linked to larger developments in scholar inquiry, questioning the blurring of tourism and migration and multiplying forms of mobility linked to social and economic changes brought on by globalization (Hall & Williams, 2002). Phenomena, such as retirement migration, entrepreneurial migration, second-home ownership and seasonal migration to leisure contexts have been examined in order to problematize various temporal and spatial underpinnings of how we understand the borders of tourism and migration. In addition, scholars have begun to conceptualize how the social, cultural, and economic structures in which these phenomena take place, are informing each other in new ways.

Researchers have argued that individualization is one of the key social shifts driving lifestyle migration and affluent migration. Individualization refers to a process where the social relations of tight knit pre-industrial communities are replaced with social relations generated from and for individuals (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In this theory of the ‘social’, in pre-industrial societies, economics and work created common efforts and experiences that framed communal everyday life and biographies between members. These daily rhythms fostered mutual dependence, whether members liked it or not, and left little room for personal inclinations, feelings and motives. In addition, the intertwining of economics and social relations gave rise to categories like social status and class, gender roles and common regulations and guidelines that lead to parallel biographies. With individualization, these collective biographies are said to be disintegrating, and are being replaced by structures that encourage the individual to supply regulations and guidelines for themselves by creating biographies through their own actions (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Reflexive and aesthetic interpretation to social and economic structures and place are also key aspects of how biographies are constructed. Post-Fordism has re-spatialized economies, which, in part, has encouraged the reshaping of socio-cultural outlooks through the reflexive constitution of identity and taste (Duncan et al., 2014; Lash & Urry, 1994).
Benson and O’Reilly (2009) have argued that lifestyle migration is in part linked to processes of individualization. Lifestyle migration is produced by people who are increasingly reflexive to and frustrated with notions of the good life in local settings; these frustrations produce a desire to escape abroad in search of more fulfilling and individualized ways of life. The authors link individualization to Bauman’s post-modern notion of liquid modernity, arguing that lifestyle migration is fundamentally different than previous forms of migration. In addition, they argue lifestyle migration should be viewed as happening in parallel to wider lifestyle choices that individuals make on a daily basis as a result of reflexivity (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009). The authors insist that while migrants of the past may have been driven by new dreams of the good life, it is only until recently, within a context of individualization and heightened reflexivity that migration has taken on these new forms.

The problem with conceptualizing affluent travel through this understanding of lifestyle is the pernicious assumption that power relations, perhaps even the subject, no longer play a critical role in generating and shaping mobility. In this way, lifestyle migration has been positioned too closely to post-modern nomadic thought. The nomad, in post-modern thinking, is said to be free from power relations that structure subjectivity through issues such as gender and class. Mobility gains importance through its meanings of flux, flow and dynamism that emphasize the importance of becoming at the expense of the already achieved, the stable and the static (Cresswell, 2006). Mobility is about travel, is non-representational (Thrift, 2008) and is always about transcending the social rather than re-producing it. The nomad, thus, is something fundamentally different from other historically situated forms of mobility.

While Benson and O’Reilly (2009) acknowledge the material and historical implications of lifestyle migration, to suggest that there is something fundamentally new about lifestyle, leaves the extent to which mobility is made meaningful through preexisting notions of mobility and within contexts of power (Cresswell, 2006). In a similar vein, to suggest that there has been a fundamental shift in lifestyle would be a mistake (Bell & Hollows, 2006) that overlooks how certain social and cultural processes give rise to both parallel and contrasting forms of lifestyle in different historical contexts. Thus, lifestyle migration is not simply motivated and shaped by lifestyle considerations: this understanding would equate to viewing affluent migrants through a romantic analytical lens (Duncan et al., 2014). Lifestyle migration is generated and becomes situated in certain contexts through very concrete factors like employment opportunities, housing
prices, and normative family structures, that in general, constitute the phenomenon through a much more complex dynamic and inter-articulation of lifestyle of migrant experiences with circulating ideas, media images, and technology (McIntyre, 2014).

In addition, who has been subject to the gaze of lifestyle migration, raises questions about who is able to engage in lifestyle migration and how this is informed by larger disciplinary discourses on migrant mobility in academia. Despite the stipulation that affluence is not necessarily a critical component of lifestyle migration, research on lifestyle migration has tended to focus on affluent westerners. In addition, the key drivers of lifestyle migration that have been identified are reflexive and aesthetic constitution of self and individualization. Thus, in examining the relevant research, we are left with a picture that reflexivity, and the mobility generated from it, is reserved for the affluent west. This understanding dynamically reinforces a discursive framework, also described above, where traditional migration consists of people who are poor, problem ridden, coming from the global south and east and unreflexively locked into global macro-economic structures and who do not maintain relations with loved ones through tourism; while western migration is problem free, nomadic, constituted through reflexive, consumptive practice, and maintenance of relationships heavily involves tourism/leisure.

Other critiques of migration (Madianou & Miller, 2011) have pointed out that too often migration research positions migrants in relation to macro-global economic and labour structures that overlook migrant autonomy and reflexivity, both in what motivates migrants to move and how they negotiate the migration experience. There is of course work that has begun to shift focus towards aspects like well-being or quality of life (Stillman et al, 2015). However, much work has focused on global care where demand for low wage care work in western contexts creates often gendered flows of migrants from developing countries. Instead, migrant motivations to move and how they constitute migration in low-wage labour often demonstrates considerable reflexivity and autonomy (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Madianou & Miller, 2011). In addition, research into affluent mobility has revealed that the capacity for reflexivity in relation to institutionalized and normative social structures that leads to agentive motility can be constrained and enabled, eroded or elevated to varying degrees, depending on a wide variety of situational and institutional contexts over time (Doherty, 2014). Furthermore, individualization in many ways is confounded by the persistence of family structures that continue to impact migrant mobility through a variety of means of support (Botterill, 2013).
In sum, the literature confirms a need for examining the manner in which affluent migration is generated and comes to be informed by family and friend relations of keeping in touch. In addition, at first glance, the highly normative and static notion of social relations depicted in the tourism research on VFR appears in part out of step with the literature here. This literature suggests that while social structures remain important and are replicated despite globalization, the literature also points to both the social contexts generating migrant mobility and subsequent patterns of keeping in touch as related to social structures that are at least under pressure or perhaps giving way to new meanings. Thus, the extent to which social structures are durable is a crucial question.

2.1.2 Social Relations as Politics and the Importance of Digital and Physical VFR in Shaping Affluent Migration

One of the most critical areas requiring further investigation into how affluent migrants are subject to different power relations is the development and maintenance of relationships of friends and family after migrating abroad. In opposition to conceptualizing affluent migrants as nomads, there is a growing body of migration research that has aimed to grasp the manner in which kinship and friendship norms persist after migration, and the means by which these norms act to mediate socio-cultural outlooks and the experiences of those who are bounded to transnational networks (Baldassar, 1997, 2007b, 2008; Botterill, 2013; Cronin, 2014; Levitt, 2001; Madianou & Miller, 2011). Two of the most important ways through which friends and family develop and maintain relations that have been identified within this literature is visiting friends and relatives and information communication technology (Backer & King, 2015; Baldassar, 2008; Elliott & Urry, 2010; Madianou & Miller, 2011).

There is still, however, too little research into VFR, and the use of ICT’s, maintaining social relations across transnational space, how these relations form migrant and tourist identities, spaces and places, and how they shape the situatedness of both migrants, and friends and family. A particularly important area of research missing from the literature is a more detailed understanding of how relationships of friends and family are shaped through the politics of VFR. These politics underpins motivations for visits, implications for who visits, and when visits occur. Understanding these politics may provide insight into how power relations that foster kinship and friendship are potentially reinforced, stretched, broken down or transcended,
and thus provide clues into how relationships mediate affluent migrant experiences. Modern mobilities are said to be informed by, and generated from, moral political economies of mobility that inhibit the mobility of some while spurring others (Cresswell, 2006). VFR does not exist in a vacuum, but is mobilized from situated geographical imaginations that provide an underlying metaphysics influencing practices of VFR mobilities and immobilities. An important component of geographical imaginations for VFR mobility, like all mobility, is how mobility is perceived as moral, or positive and negative. Moralities of mobility shed light on how (im)mobilities are generated from, and interrogate, norms that intersect with issues of family, friendship, gender, age and ethnicity, while providing the parameters of how mobility and immobility are experienced and perceived by different groups.

The inter-connectivity and continued development of family and friendship no doubt play a substantial role in generating and structuring VFR mobilities and immobilities, and the experiences of friendship and kinship along transnational networks. In addition, a critical aspect of the individualization narrative has been that the self is constituted beyond moral expectations that underpin normative structure (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In VFR, moral expectations can often generate frequent migrant return visits due to friends and family who are unable or unwilling to visit migration contexts; this has secondary impacts like disabling the migrants’ ability to partake in other forms of leisure travel (O’Dell, 2004). The manner in which political economies emerge, draw from and shift normative notions of kinship and friendship, and the means by which friendship and kinship are developed over time through both return visits and visits to migration contexts, has yet to be researched in depth. Additionally, one of the more significant means through which migrant ontologies are developed is relationally, through the social relations of friends and family (Botterill, 2013). Thus, how expectations arise, can also shed potentially significant light on how migrant selves are constituted in relation to friends and family, and not as an individualized self.

In relation to ICTs, the relationship between digital communication and migrant networks is a burgeoning field of interest (Fortunati et al., 2012). One of the most significant contributions to migration research in relation to ICTs has come from Madianou and Miller (2011). Their study of how Philippine migrant mothers in the UK use ICTs to maintain relationships with their children living in the Philippines clearly demonstrates the impact normative kinship structures
have on migration experiences. Mothers attempt to fulfill perceived expectations to children to provide care (including financial), discipline, guidance, and emotional affection through technology. Surveillance and control through ICTs quickly become an integral part of daily life for both mothers and children. The authors argue that not only are migrant mothers not free from norms of motherhood based on gender, but as both mothers and children begin to leverage different technologies in relation to each other, kinship structures are often reproduced through technological co-presence. In addition, because relationships become such an integrated aspect of transnational experiences, relationships also mediate migrant identities both in how migrant mothers perceive the desire for return migration and children perceive their mothers as migrants who could one day return home. Thus, virtual mobility is also generated and negotiated from a politics of mobility that is underpinned by, and gives new meaning to, moralities of kinship.

There is still, however, very little research that has attempted to examine the virtual and physical mobility politics in relation to both VFR and ICTs together. While Madianou and Miller’s study has made an important contribution to migration and ICT’s, the research was somewhat limited in that the work did not focus on VFR and only examined relations between mothers and children. For many migrants, after migration, relationships between family and friends are largely carried out during VFR visits and/or with communication technology. Moreover, recent research (Humbracht, 2015) has revealed that a key motivation for VFR from family and friends is to build collective and embodied imaginations of place and everyday life that can be used to facilitate more intimate communication when apart through ICT’s. This suggests that, at least in part, VFR mobilities and communication technologies are co-productive. Or that VFR shapes the cultural meanings and social relationships of technology, and the material and social affordances related to ICT’s play a role in producing the meanings and relationships that occur during visits. The relationships of family and friends are mediated through both physical and virtual mobility that attempts to simultaneously draw-on, generate and structure collective and individual repertoires of social and cultural memory.

In addition, while Madianou and Millers work has been helpful in thinking through the durability of social structures and social relations as reflexive politics, their work has also in part helped reinforce a body of work, like individualization, that views traditional social relations as dissolving in light of increased mobility and diffusion of ICTs.
2.1.3 Togetherness Dismantled?

In parallel to theories of individualization, Zygmunt Bauman’s *liquid love* (2003) and Andreas Wittel’s (2001) work on contemporary sociality and togetherness have been highly pessimistic of the rise of increased mobility and ICTs. Bauman argues that we no longer live in the solid times of industrialized modernity and have now pasted to liquid times of post-modernity. At the heart of liquid modern times is mobility and information technology that together provoke frail and superficial forms of togetherness. This sociality is considerably different from the solid bonds of modern times when relationships were constituted through moral economies that emerged from stable and tight-knit communities. In today’s fast moving world, where people are more and more on the move, togetherness is dismantled and bonds are replaced by connections (Bauman, 2003). Connections that Wittel argues, have destabilized communities, are not based on common history and experience and are no longer narrational, but largely informational (Germann Molz, 2012; Wittel, 2001). Bauman and Wittel believe these kinds of relationships are easily deleted and thrown aside when they become too tight as to be restrictive or when they lose their value. While solid bonds still exist, they are now highly heterodoxical when compared to the more diffused, ephemeral and shallow connections. In addition, Bauman (2003) believes the more the social world is entwined with technologically mediated connections, the more complicit relationships become to market forces that seek to commodify those connections:

The fading of sociality skills is boosted and accelerated by the tendency, inspired by the dominant consumerist life mode, to treat other humans as objects of consumption and to judge them after the pattern of consumer objects by the volume of pleasure they are likely to offer, and in the ‘value for money’ terms. At best, the others are valued as companions in the essentially solitary activity of consumption; fellows in the joys of consumption, whose presence and active participation may intensify those pleasures (p.75).

For Bauman, today’s relationships are now infused with a market logic that creates connections based on a pleasure/value binary and are easily discarded once that pleasure recedes. Thus, he argues that in many ways relationships parallel the life cycle of a consumer product, as they are short, provide quick moments of pleasure and then are thrown into the waste bin.
Bauman and Wittel’s pessimism, as well as individualization has been challenged from a variety of scholars arguing the contrary that increased mobility and ICTs can in fact strengthen connections (Botterill, 2013; Cronin, 2014; Germann Molz, 2012; Walsh, 2009). In addition, while Bauman and Wittel provide powerful and important arguments on contemporary togetherness, their pessimistic outlook falls into a trap of much post-modern thinking that has overemphasized temporal rupture. While mobility and new communication technologies do produce new definitions of time, space and community, they do not necessarily erase, but rather can overlay our old understandings of distance and duration (Morley, 2000). In addition, research attempting to theorize that nature of contemporary communities should avoid nostalgic idealizing of the past (Amin & Thrift, 2002) that is implicit to Bauman’s idea of bonds in modern communities. We should not be asking whether mobile lives and new technologies result in more or less cohesive societies, but rather what kind of sociality they produce and how people share with one another, care for each other and integrate themselves into each other’s everyday lives, even when apart (Germann Molz, 2012).

Despite critique, though, formulations of individualization and/or liquid modernity persist or can sneak in the back door of analysis. For instance, in parallel to liquid modernity and individualization, Giddens (1992) has argued that the rise of reflexive self is giving way to heightened agency in relationships leading to a democritisation of kin ties, called the pure relationship. Or simply, agents bypass kin structures creating relationships consisting of more equal individuals, like friends. Madianou and Miller have employed Giddens’ work while simultaneously attempting to show the persistence of kin ties after migration. While their work has demonstrated the extent to which relationships can be conducted through ICTs at a distance, using a dialectical approach, they conclude that:

the point is not that we leave the arena of normative relationships but rather the pure relationship is itself a shift in that normative ideal. As Giddens (1991) showed, people believe in these pure relationships because they feel this new normative form is closer to the actual personalities of those involved in the relationship (Madianou & Miller, 2011, p. 146).

Thus, despite attempts to avoid the pessimism of dissolving relations, we are nonetheless left with an image that there is a teleology underpinning globalization that creates tensions
between traditional norms and individuals, which is in turn produces individualized relations through migrant mobility and ICTs. While research viewing globalization as politics suggests that globalization can act to globalize traditional norms, we come back full circle to where we began, putting conceptualization in line with binaries, where migrant mobility and keeping in touch is understood as negotiating mobile identities, yet based on closeness and distance (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014) or together and apart (Bauman, 2003). Therefore, there is a need to rethink our theoretical foundations on globalization and transnationalism to more fully avoid the nostalgic pessimism that has come to dominate academic discourses.

2.2 Moving towards the Ethical: Sociality and Ethical Imaginations of Physical and Digital VFR

At this point, it is important to highlight that the literature presented thus far has confirmed a need for further research regarding the threads identified in the introduction and in many ways stands in opposition to conclusions from the VFR tourism literature. In the first place, there is a need to investigate the link between VFR and ICTs in constituting social relations after migration. While kin structures maybe lead to ICT contact and VFR visits/frequencies, and obligation is still in place, more attention is needs to be paid to how VFR and ICT contact is a matter of not only obligations, but the construction and negotiation of expectations from reflexive agents. Furthermore, contrary to the argument for dividing kinship and friendship, the literature suggests that because of shifting social relations from globalization examining keeping in touch offers an opportunity to compare notions of kinship and friendship that may be blurring. In parallel, there is evidence that the relationships that produce VFR may not simply be about divisions between consumer practice and cultural norms, but that they could be contributing to a blurring between the two. Thus, there is an overall need to understand further how shifting social relations contribute to generating affluent forms of migration. Especially, there is a need to understand the power relations linked to kinship and friendship that guide keeping in touch and potentially blurring meanings of kinship, friendship and consumer practice.

2.2.2 The Ethical Imagination

Crucially, such an investigation needs to understand the persistence or non-persistence of relationships in light of heightened reflexivity without resorting to nostalgic pessimism or teleological understandings of globalization built from binary oppositions like together/apart, local/global, culture/capitalism, or tradition/loss. To do so, this thesis draws from Henrietta
Moore’s work on globalization and recent work within mobilities studies. Moore (2011) has argued somewhat provocatively that globalization is not in fact global, as it exists as a partial condition with no teleology of completion and with no coherent set of forces. Rather she views it as dynamic sets of processes establishing and disestablishing uneasy, shifting and often provisional connections. She argues for a blunt break with theories that either actively or passively embrace the pessimism of social relations as tradition and destruction. Instead, Moore draws from affect/performance theory and Foucault’s work on ethics to argue for sociality as a dynamic relational matrix linked the formation of ethical imaginations (Long & Moore, 2013b). She defines the ethical imagination as the way in which technologies of the self, forms of subjectification and imagined relations with others lead to novel ways of approaching social transformation (Moore, 2011). This suggests moving away from a politics of mobility as far as politics equate to moralities that view mobility through binaries of positive or negative (Cresswell, 2006), such as between sedentary family values that resist migration, the use of ICTs, or travel for visits and migrants who view them positively. This approach also entails moving away from discussions of dissolving moral codes. Instead, while the thesis does not focus on ethics per se, the aim is to investigate how migrants and friends and family use ICTs and VFR to re-imagine relations to self and others inter-subjectively.

This focus relates to Foucault’s arguments on an individual’s ability to reflect upon moral codes and contexts, provoking the formation of an ethical self that forms a relation to self through thought and practice. To think of the self always entails theories of self-other relations, and any discussion of the self in relation to others must necessarily engage with ‘the stuff of ethics’ (Moore, 2011). Self-formation and its various forms happen within historically situated conditions that afford particular forms of self-problematization and self-other relations. Globalization, through the increase in electronic media and diverse forms of mobility is intensifying processes of problematization across multiple, yet specific areas of life (Faubion, 2001) ranging from sexuality, working life and forms of mobility. Within each area, technologies of the self help individuals to free up the self for the possible and in doing so, attach the self to history through processes and practices of subjectification, or the release of oneself from oneself (Faubion, 2001) by making the self into an object that can be transformed. Foucault (1985) described the telos of the ethical subject as an act that becomes moral in its circumstantial
integration and by virtue of the place it occupies in a pattern of conduct, of acting upon the self, to monitor, test, improve and transform himself, or as Moore (2011) put it referencing Foucault:

Not simply self-cultivation as a form of individualization or the embrace of possessive individualism, but more properly as Foucault described it, a desperate attempt to imagine the present, ‘to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but grasping in it what it is, a drive to give form not only to self but to the world and to relations with others, a way of being (pg.20).

Importantly, ethics of the self is always constituted through the intersubjective and relational development of self-other relations. Moore suggests that Foucault’s work helps uncover a crucial area of globalization studies in that “it is our relations with others, the vexed question of what we share, of how we set our personal and political horizons, the character of contemporary forms of belonging and the complex relations they entail that have become problematized (Moore, 2011)”. Moore’s work suggests investigating not motivations for migration, or viewing migration as a one-off event, but migration as process. In other words, how problematizations of self and belonging contribute to migration and in turn become a vehicle to develop and give form to self, setting the parameters of identity and belonging. Furthermore, her work suggests understanding the manner in which migrants as ethical-subjects extend belonging and recognize the self through how they develop, practice and monitor a relational ethics of self-other relations with friends and family using VFR and ICTs.

In addition, in departing from Foucault, Moore argues that problematization is not simply the work of ethics, but of performance, affect and fantasy. How people cultivate selves is not simply a matter of language linked to practices, like journaling as detailed in Foucault’s book *History of Sexuality Volume Three: Care for the Self* (Foucault, 1986). This process is also linked to identity from doing, habits guiding unconscious thought, and the sensual registers of the body that inform fantasies of possibility and connect us to others through affect and emotion. Thus, this thesis argues for, in part, investigating how people tie themselves to others through both ethical formations of self and performative practice. This entails neither simply investigating a predetermined set of activities, practices, or expenditures within VFR visits, nor looking exclusively at Skype and messaging practices. Nor does it suggest examining only the mechanics, development and experiences of practices. Instead, the thesis will investigate how
people imagine and think ethically about migrant selves. The investigation involves understanding how those imaginations of self inform the creation of social relations and frame what counts as important for relationships in practice, that then enters in self-disciplining systems and performances of self and self-other relations that can be fluidly modified and that create affective attachments. This focus may involve and interconnect a variety of issues on how people think about relationships, and the practices themselves. That may overlap issues of which ICTs to use and when, and the difficulties of integrating them into daily life, or the direction, frequency, duration of stay for visits or a variety of individual and shared experiences.

2.2.3 Mobility and Immobility

This thesis takes inspiration from mobility studies that have drawn attention to the relational production of power relations leading to relations of mobility and immobility (Cresswell, 2006; Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006). A critical question to answer is to what extent are different relationships involved in the formation of new socialities through VFR and ICTs? How are different levels of participation co-produced? By focusing on mobility and immobility, this dissertation will be better able to grasp how socialites are produced through changes in relationships that existed pre-migration and the dynamics of those relationships.

This approach aids making comparisons between friendship and kinship by examining how different relationships of kith and kin form different levels of commitments to keep in touch through visits and ICTs after migration – and how these commitments may constitute different meanings of kinship and friendship. Thus, the question is also how mobility and immobility may uncover power dynamics of kinship and friendship. As Morley (2000) pointed out when discussing mobility and technology, “the ultimate issue is not who moves or who is still but who has control – both over their connectivity and over their capacity to withdraw and disconnect” (p.199). The question that needs asking then becomes to what extent do mobile subjects choose to connect, and to what extent are they compelled to do so (Germann Molz, 2012)? Migration can enable development of the self, and ICTs and VFR afford the possibility to develop selves in relation to distant loved ones. However, they also allow forms of surveillance to gaze and monitor others, keeping people tied to social obligations (Molz, 2004).
Regarding control, at one level, the state exerts control over who moves and who does not within Europe. For this thesis, the possibility for movement is linked to the state institutions of the EU, UK and Italy and the manner in which these organizations use discursive techniques to control the mobility of bodies within Europe that explicitly relates to Foucault's work on biopolitics. This thesis though is not interested in examining relations between power/knowledge apparatuses and their surveillance capacity. Instead, the focus is more on self-governance at a micro-level. In constructing ethical selves, people engage with norms and rules, but they do not determine the form the self will take (Foucault, 1985). Genealogies of self and selves in relation to others that are implicit to problematizations help form the conditions of possibility in which people struggle to give form to self. Those forms may lead to commitments or obligations that favour certain relations, certain elements and histories within relationships that inform the construction of relations and blur friendship and kinship. A father, who for instance, that has a history of common leisure habits with his migrant son, may commit to visits that revolve more around fun than care and advice. Distant friends who are both parents may come to offer significant levels of childcare and advice to each other through Skype chats and visits. This dissertation aims to understand how both physical and virtual mobility can be viewed as forms of mobility whose affordances are leveraged together to control and manage both individual relationships, and different sets of relationships while mediated by ethics. Moreover, it focuses on understanding how this dynamic reflects the constitution of ethical selves through the development of self-other relations that may blur meanings of kinship and friendship, culture and consumer practice.

2.2.4 Intimacy, Identity and Belonging

Furthermore, inherent in questioning kinship and friendship and different forms that mediate connections is the intersection of intimacy, identity and belonging. By proposing the fundamental question of what and how we share our worlds with others, Moore’s work places this intersection at the heart of sociality. Indeed, an important theme from the existing research examining virtual and physical keeping in touch has sought to theorize how different forms of co-presence configure subjectivities of the extraordinary and everyday (Baldassar, 2008; Elliott & Urry, 2010). An important insight, drawing on performance theory, is that travel must be understood not in contrast to everyday life, but as an extension of it, and in how mundane habits, practices and material objects create familiarity in seemingly extraordinary settings (Germann
Molz, 2012). Objects in migrant lives, for instance, can enact familiar practices, creating palpable connections between transnational contexts (Povrzanovic Frykman & Humbracht, 2013); objects like ICTs, or food that can help create familiarity for those who visit, those who go home to visit, or those who use ICTs in their daily lives. Equally, encounters during visits can also lead to experiences of unfamiliarity (Uriely, 2010), such as those who travel to visit someone in an urban area from a more rural area.

Considering the above framework, what is of interest to this thesis, is to understand how people give form to self by utilizing ICTs and VFR to develop new forms of intimacy, and new ways of imagining intimate relations with others that may or may not extend notions of belonging across transnational space. Importantly, how do fantasy and affect come to play a role in shaping intimacy? People’s ability to feel connected and enact familiar practices can act as a powerful mobilizing force for keeping in touch, and that can shape decisions related to continued mobility like migration (Cronin, 2014). The literature thus far points to investigating what migrants think about intimacy in relation to migrant selves that shape desires for keeping in touch in different ways with different people. What becomes the desirable means to keep in touch and in relation to what kind of intimacy do they create or perhaps do they not create? What kind of possibilities for togetherness are opened up? Do shared performances and experiences of ICTs and VFR with friends and family help co-develop identities and notions of belonging that foster togetherness? If so, does that contribute to differing levels of participation? In performing ethical principles and values, how do experiences of intimacy perhaps alter those values? These are the initial questions that frame further exploration in chapter four.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to review some key literature that informs understandings of highly skilled migration and contemporary social relations, while also setting an agenda for the remaining literature review chapters and methodology. Key to the literature on affluent forms of migration has been lifestyle migration (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). The thesis argues that while lifestyle migration has helped highlight the imaginative and narrative capacity of migrants’ lifestyle, migration imbues globalization with a telos of liquidity and social dissolution that assumes a bifurcated version of the social world and points towards viewing co-presence as free from obligation. Clearly, the considerable amount of work that has demonstrated the continued
relevance and parallel development of reflexivity and social structure through co-presence, renders lifestyle migration a problematic concept. The thesis argues, however, that while the literature advocating for the continued prominence of social structure is important, this work has been overly focused on tradition versus loss, grounded in difference, and in many ways has simply re-packaged discourses on individualization and democratization into a more optimistic form.

Therefore, the thesis argues in favour of developing an alternative starting point by drawing from Henrietta Moore’s (2011) notion of the ethical imagination. In drawing on Moore’s work, the thesis aims to shift the focus of highly skilled migration and relationships at distance, away from binary discourses, anchored in difference and pessimism, and towards understanding how migrants and family exploit cultural forms like kinship and friendship and modes of travel like migration and tourism in order to re-imagine possibilities for togetherness. The thesis argues that this focus entails examining the manner in which social relations are organized around digital and physical (im)mobilities - not necessarily related to gender or class, but the inter-subjective and relational ethics that situates subjectivities within particular contexts. Thus, in part, this focus calls for a better understanding of the literature on kinship and friendship that will aid in understanding them as cultural forms, while also setting a means for framing the research in terms of migrant contexts. In addition, the thesis also argues that Moore’s work helps point to the importance of understanding the problematization and intersection of intimacies and identities/belongings.
3 VFR, Personal Communities and the Ethics of Kinship and Friendship

3.1 Introduction

Kinship and friendship have a rich history in academic research. To review both is a daunting task. Kinship is one of the primary blocks upon which Anthropology, and to certain extent sociology, was founded. The majority of early research from Anthropology and the theoretical frameworks that informed much of twentieth-century Anthropology was based on kinship. The bonds of friendship and their links to political and community relations have been one of the primary topics of interest of philosophy dating back to Aristotle. Thus, a complete representation of the literature from both fields is well beyond the space allotted here. In comparison, VFR has been met with significantly less interest, its importance, however, has emerged in connection with parallel shifts in the global increase in number and forms of mobility (migrant, student, labor, tourist, etc.) and the ability to maintain social relations over greater distances. Therefore, this thesis is in line with calls for academic research into friendship and kinship configured through VFR (Janta et al., 2015), within a context of new inter-articulations of global mobility and the diffusion of information communication technologies (ICTs).

This chapter aims to review the academic literature on friendship, kinship and VFR for insight into the nature and qualities of social bonds that are entwined in VFR and ICT practices, and how these practices configure the blueprint for changing forms of togetherness. This chapter first provides a general background of kinship and friendship studies to create a theoretical grounding that will inform the rest of the discussion. From there the chapter presents the emergence of VFR and some of the literature that has begun to conceptualize the phenomenon. The chapter will conclude by positioning this thesis in relation to existing research and offer an agenda for moving forward.

3.2 Background: From Aristotle to Bourdieu

3.2.1 Kinship

The aim of this section is to review the long and rich history of scholarship on kinship and friendship. The inter-workings of these issues have provided the basis for significant theoretical developments and part of the foundational building blocks of philosophy and anthropology, while also offering significant contributions to both psychology and sociology.
I will begin with kinship. Studies of kinship were at the centre of major theoretical developments, and indeed the development of some academic disciplines, during the 19th and 20th century. A book largely associated with the foundation of kinship studies and anthropology is Morgan’s (1966) 1871 publication *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family*. Understandings of kinship were first established by Morgan’s argument that all societies universally pass through certain stages of linear progress by organizing according to bloodlines and marriage. Morgan’s book established kinship as a central phenomenon in societies and set the tone for engagement with several of the most influential scholars of the time. Many leading American, British and French Anthropologists and Sociologists would all engage kinship studies, producing what are now seen as classics of the disciplines. The functionalism of Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) and the structural functionalism of Radcliffe-Brown (1952) both emerged through studies of kinship. Structural functionalism stated that the meaning of a particular institution or custom, like marriage, was derived from its function in society as a whole. This work embodied theories of social evolution that were dominant at the time and that explained culture and society as similar to organisms that were composed of and reducible to parts like organs and limbs that function together. This notion of the social is highly deterministic and was thought to follow a linear evolution from one stage of progress to the next.

Structuralism, one of the most influential bodies of intellectual thought in the 20th century, was also created largely through the study of kinship, particularly through Claude Levi-Strauss (1969) and his seminal work *the Elementary Structure of Kinship*. Levi-Strauss wanted to move away from functionalist notions of kinship that argued meaning is generated in how it functions to meet the needs of the individual, and more generally placed the nuclear family at the centre of Kinship studies. In building on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Marcel Mauss, Levi-Strauss attempted to explain what gave rise to rules against incest and the use of exogamy and how this builds relationships between potentially rival groups. Thus, Levi-Strauss shifted attention from the content and functioning of kinship relations to a concern with the underlying ‘deep structures’ of the human mind that give rise to social structure and create cohesion between different and often rival social groups (Peletz, 1995).

Levi-Strauss (1969) argued that society does not function to serve the needs simply of marriage and lineage, but that kinship was organized around both descent and building alliances
between groups through the obligation of exchange and reciprocity of wives. Strauss stipulated that as the mind is structured according to binary oppositions, these structures emerge in the social world in the formation of groups and the binary relations between them. The theory put forth that societies are not reducible to their parts, but individual elements get their meaning in relation to their place within structure, in and between groups. Thus, the meaning attached to labels, like sister and mother is only produced in relation to their position within underlying structures that form complete systems of meaning. In this way, we can only understand the meaning and authority of a father or a mother in relation to the meaning of a daughter and in relation to a male cousin. In addition, these social structures are universal for all humans. However, the meanings and relations between categories will be different and constitute different realities in different societies depending on how that society is organized in opposition to categories within alliances and lineages.

When applied to migrant mobility and VFR, structuralism helps to reveal how social relations within VFR are governed by principles and norms that organize the meaning of different categories (like mother, son or daughter) in relation to each other across transnational space. These systems of meanings make up the natural order of kinship that guides behaviour post-migration. When looking at kinship, a structuralist might start by examining the patriarchal kinship system and gender in Italy (Kertzer & Saller, 1991; R. Miller & Miller, 1978; Moss & Cappannari, 1960), where the meaning of a mother, father, daughter, and son obtain meaning from their binary opposite and within a system organized around the authority of the father. Keeping in touch will be organized according to this paradigm, with women likely charged with maintaining contact because of underlying notions of purity that should keep women out of economic roles and more involved in family life. Each individual, and the category they represent, has meaning that fits with a natural order of kinship. While structuralism has problems that will be flushed out, the general principle that kinship categories organize norms and obtain meaning in relation to others is an important building block for this thesis.

The legacy of structuralism provided the springboard against which several of the most significant theoretical movements and sub-movements of the 20th century would rise. Largely originating from French intellectuals, post-structuralism movements emerged that ranged from deconstruction to performance theory and included influential theorists like Jacques Derrida,
Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Lacan, Henri Lefebvre, and Judith Butler. The main brunt of the attack against structuralism took issue with the highly fixed, static, and abstract understandings of meaning and the relations that structuralism proposed. Michael Foucault (2003), while dealing only to a limited extent with kinship, demonstrated the temporal problems with structuralism by understanding how subjects take on different meaning in different historical contexts through the control and distribution of knowledge by state apparatuses that establish power relationships of domination and subjugation. Feminists interested in kinship and gender echoed Foucault’s focus on power by committing themselves to developing gendered approaches to kinship, marriage and inter-generational marriages (Peletz, 1995). In addition, cultural relativism argued that truth and the epistemological underpinnings of cultural and social meaning are generated through particular frames and practices that constitute the entirety of social worlds.

Pierre Bourdieu however, leveled the most influential critique against structuralism in relation to kinship. Bourdieu’s complex theoretical approach to kinship was also concerned with power. However, instead of state institutions as with Foucault, Bourdieu was concerned with the inter-generational reproduction of class relations through embodied practice. Bourdieu’s neo-Marxist critique took issue with structuralism’s inability to explain continuity and change within different societies and different expressions of agency that are implicit to change. Bourdieu argued that social relations are structured, re-structured and signified through the behavioral strategies of actors who inherit and become situated in particular material and historical contexts (Bourdieu, 1977). By centring his arguments on the iterative and embodied nature of practices instead of relying on language, Bourdieu sought to problematize the fixity of Levi-Strauss’s principles of social structure by demonstrating the ambiguity that underlays the myriad contexts actors face. For Bourdieu, meaning is generated in how actors face ambiguity by organizing themselves, relate to one another, acquire and use resources, and re-create order (Peletz, 1995).

In analyzing parallel cousin marriage, instead of simply arguing that social positions obtain meaning according to principles of kinship, Bourdieu (1977) conducted a Marxist analysis of kin relations that form from agents who inherit and accumulate symbolic, material, and social capital. This capital gains value and is organized in relation to the laws of the market and the social field it’s embedded in; that form the social conditions of possibility informing the creation
of strategic practices. Furthermore, Bourdieu’s approach argues that the contexts and dispositions that inform the logic of practice are internalized at the level of the body, and it is through these embodied dispositions that strategy is formed. This approach is important for the discussion here in two ways. First, by juxtaposing context with practices, Bourdieu offers a rich theoretical model for explaining the dialectics of practices through strategy and contradiction. Second, he makes explicit that kinship relations and moral obligation are always linked to economy (and perhaps always have been). While Bourdieu’s notion of moral obligation and economy may differ from Bauman’s arguments on the commodification and superficiality of bonds, Bourdieu reminds us that practice never ceases to conform to economy (Bourdieu, 1977 as quoted by Appadurai, 2013).

Bourdieu’s notion of practice and change though, has been criticized for being overly glacial in nature (Appadurai, 1996), and for not going far enough in understanding the fluidity of relations. What’s more, Bourdieu is largely concerned with social reproduction and not social change (Doherty, 2014). Thus, Bourdieu’s theory of practices helps shed light on how migrants reproduce meanings of kinship through VFR and ICT practices. In addition, Bourdieu also assists with understanding agency, by pointing attention to how migrants may restructure and signify normative obligations by developing strategies to resist staying in touch that are constructed along gender lines. In regard to Italian kinship, Bourdieu might agree that women (and the categories they represent) lead to obligations to keep in touch, however, he would point to examining VFR and ICT practices and the manner in which informants manage ambiguity between contextual fields and kinship norms through practice. Migration is a means to build social and financial capital within a context of a re-structuring middle class that views mobility more positively while keeping in touch equates to the maintenance and development of certain types of social capital that have been disrupted by globalization (Griffin, 2012; Reynolds & Zontini, 2013). Migrants could be equated to cogs within capitalist systems who are developing strategies through ICTs and VFR to maintain kin and kith rights, meet duties, and perhaps build capital as mobile subjects. Bourdieu does not, however, leave much room for transcending norms. Thus, while Bourdieu offers an instructive guide to the dialectics of kinship practice, we require an understanding of kinship relations that is more negotiated.
3.2.3 Friendship

The purpose of this section is not to make a complete presentation of the concept of friendship in the academic literature but to offer a basic foundation for how friendship has been understood in academia through out history, that will better inform the discussion of friendship as it pertains to kinship, VFR and ICT practices. Therefore, this section presents some basic understandings of friendship while more recent empirical and conceptual developments are more appropriately discussed in the next section in parallel to blurring kinship and friendship.

Friendship, like kinship, has a vibrant history of academic and scholarly inquiry. Anthropology and Sociology have both dedicated significant research to the topic. Friendship has also received significant interest from some of history’s most influential philosophers in the west. Philosophical work goes back to Aristotle, followed by Cicero, Seneca, Montague, Kant, Nietzsche, and later Foucault and Derrida. For Aristotle, as with Cicero and Seneca, friendship is principally a form of love (Evenepoel, 2007). The philosophical question driving philosophers was to understand what kind of love friendship is, and what the limits of this kind of love are. Aristotle began his treatment of friendship by arguing that there are three types of bonds: 1) friendship based on utility, where the relationship is mutually beneficial for pragmatic purposes; 2) friendship of pleasure, where the relationship is deemed pleasurable for both, for any variety of reasons; and lastly 3). Friendship based on virtue, where one finds the kind of love between friends based on their moral goodness (Pangle, 2002). Aristotle’s account of friendship encapsulates a wide variety of relationships, friendships of utility for example, could describe anyone who helps to move house, to the waiter who brings you your food. His model is interesting as an early understanding of friendship as hierarchical and moral in nature. For Aristotle, the highest form of friendship is when the relationship between two people of equal virtue develops their virtuous qualities. This form of friendship is superior to the imperfect forms of friendship based on utility and pleasure. While this framework implies the important moral nature of friendship, it is slightly elitist and lacking elements of trust, emotional support and sharing that are key to VFR.

Seneca and Cicero, while agreeing with several aspects of Aristotle’s treatise, depart from Aristotle’s notion of friendship by arguing it is something that is free of self-interest, a kind of love to do good that is underpinned by vulnerability (Evenepoel, 2007). There is vulnerability
because the relationship is not based on two of the same selves, as with an alter ego, but distinct selves that desire to do good with and by another (Evenepoel, 2007). Thus, from some of the earliest arguments we are presented with an understanding of friendship as divided into categories and importance, with moral forms of friendship occupying the high ground. There are some parallels here to Bauman’s arguments in that the most prized relationships are based on moral economies, over those relationships that are based on the pleasure of consumption and leisure.

Aristotle also makes clear that he sees friendship and family as separate entities. He argues that a child can never rid himself of the debt of his father, and equally, a parent’s love is so deep as to never be able to disown a child; this is a love more meaningful than utility, pleasure or even virtue (Pangle, 2002). Foucault (1997) would later echo this argument by ascribing friendship a status as something outside of the heteronormative gaze of juridical institutions. In addition, while friendship can be based on morality, it is voluntary and does not contain formal obligations, creating the privilege of choice and thus linking friendship to the co-creation and reinforcement of identities (Cronin, 2014; Rebughini, 2011). While friendship, however, may lack formal forms of obligation implicit in kinship, friendship is constructed through social and moral norms, forms of reciprocity and trust (Cronin, 2014). Particularly in regard to best friends, moral dimensions like loyalty, durability, acceptance and honesty are salient in forming friendships (Spencer & Pahl, 2006).

The norms governing friendship in classical philosophy have largely related to discussions of politics and community. Aristotle argued that essential to understanding friendship was the link between justice and political and community life (Pangle, 2002). Aristotle could be seen as one of the earliest to call for the importance of local bonds, or bonds based on physical proximity and essentialist identities, in sustaining citizenry and community. For Aristotle, in friendship, justice becomes taken for granted and is never a problem where there is friendship. In the same way, some degree of friendship is necessary to have the kind of justice that holds together a community (Pangle, 2002). It is because friends freely desire to do good to each other by means of daily reciprocity and sharing that solidarity, common imagination, and fraternity are formed and ultimately create the bonds that hold together the political life of community. A sense that also informs the creation of justice between those who are not friends within a given
community. Derrida (1997), however, when deconstructing friendship in western culture back through Aristotle argued that friendship is thoroughly gendered and familial. He stipulated that all friendships are underpinned by the possibility of enemy or intimacy but that for there to be the intimacy of friendship, philosophy’s discussion of politics has always constructed friendship as androcentric, familial and fraternalistic. Thus, friendships articulated after migration will engage with heterosexual and masculine norms of togetherness. What’s more, as with kinship, building social capital is a key means through which friendship is produced (Cronin, 2014; Yaojun, Savage, & Pickles, 2003). Friendship, as a means of constituting identity, is linked to economy in that it has often been defined through local class relations (Graham, 1979) and according to occupations. Raising the question of can you be friends with someone outside of your class (Buchberger, 2014) position and gender.

The roots of friendship in academic literature define the phenomena as hierarchical (with utility and pleasure having the least value), highly gendered and based on class relations. Locally based relations of communities also appear to be the highest in quality reflecting highly sedentary and solid values of friendship. Thus, while on one side the literature reinforces Bauman’s arguments defining the quality of bonds as moral over hedonistic, there is also much to argue that bonds have always been differentiated and that moral economies of solidarity have always been inflected through market economies and exchanges of class relations. While the literature review thus far has positioned friendship as a wholly separate entity from kinship, there has been significant social turbulences over the past thirty years that have begun to produce research on the blurring of friendship and kinship.

3.3 Globalization and Social Relations as Late Modernity

The literature presented thus far articulates kinship and friendship mostly through bounded communities that inadequately reflect the impact of globalization and thus does little to help explain the link between VFR and kinship and friendship. VFR mobility first emerged as a significant social phenomenon in early modern industrialism when erosion of centralized authority in kinship structures undermined norms that mobility should involve all kin (Janta et al., 2015; Litwak & Szelenyi, 1969). Increasingly, however, VFR is tied to intensifying global processes that incite the inter-articulation of political, cultural, social and economic spheres. These spheres are being interwoven and respatialized through the increased mobility of people,
technology, money, media and ideas producing disjunctive effects on the local, and local relations (Appadurai, 1996). Social relationships, whether for those who are on the move or not, are no longer (and perhaps never were) articulated simply through the local but through tensions of both local and global forces. The rapid diffusion of ICTs and new media and the increasing number and form of mobile people is leading to subjectivities that are distanciated and embedded in and between multiple contexts.

Increased VFR is possible, in part, as a result of the respatialization of economies that spur multiple forms of migrant mobilities. As has been detailed in the previous chapter, it could also be argued that the fragmentation of social relationships (Bauman, 2003; Wittel, 2001) is generating socio-political and socio-cultural worlds that further enable migrant mobilities. It has been argued that fragmentation is tied to processes of individualization (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) where selves are increasingly insulated and generated from idiosyncrasy. Yet, VFR has grown from a desire or expectation for kin and non-kin to remain in contact. As phenomena such as air travel, Facebook, and Skype have grown, both migrants and non-migrants daily lives become betwixt between local and global contexts. This does not however, mean that VFR is anything new. Circulating migrants have no doubt always attempted to keep in touch. What maybe different is the form, frequency and means through which contact is kept.

3.3.4 Intimacy, Commitment and the Blurring of Friendship and Kinship

Research into VFR has not yet attempted to grasp the changing nature of social relations embroiled within VFR, and there is still little research into the forms of sociality emerging from the intersection of VFR and ICT’s and kinship and friendship. In addition to other drivers like urbanization (Amin & Thrift, 2002), there has been growing interest in the changing nature of the social bonds of kinship and friendship as a result of increased mobility, ubiquitous ICT’s, and the interconnectivity of locally situated subjects over varying distances in western contexts. An early voice on late modernity and relationships came from Anthony Giddens (1992) and his work that drew from Foucault’s books entitled the History of Sexuality. Giddens has argued that kin authority is diminishing, placing the quality of the relationship as the highest priority, with a stress upon intimacy replacing that of parental authoritativeness, and where sensitivity and understanding are asked for on both sides (ibid). He has termed these relationships the pure
Desires and Fantasies for Togetherness: Physical and Digital VFR

relationship, a form of relationship that has come to dominate all of personal life. This is a promise of democracy, he argues:

The structural source of this promise is the emergence of the pure relationship, not only in the area of sexuality but also in those of parent-child relations, and other forms of kinship and friendship. We can envisage the development of an ethical framework for a democratic personal order, which in sexual relationships and other personal domains conforms to a model of confluent love (ibid, p.188).

The consequences of the pure relationship at a basic level are that kinship has begun to mirror friendship’s elective nature and capacity. In parallel, friendship has also opened to the possibility of developing higher levels of commitment. Understanding the ethical formations that give rise to different forms of commitment becomes paramount. In addition, Giddens has helped instigate a general interest in intimacy or a rise in intimacy over authority that has helped to decenter normative understandings of kinship and helped to highlight the almost impossible task of defining kinship (Holdsworth, 2013). Studies of intimacy as it pertains to kinship and friendship, in particular regarding distanciated relations, have been growing steadily over the past ten years (See for example Cronin, 2014; Germann Molz, 2012; Parrenas, 2005; Van Vleet, 2008).

In relation to kinship though, significant research has focused on ascertaining whether traditional kinship structures of obligation and reciprocity are subverted or stretched, changing or experiencing continuity. Many scholars have sought to downplay the extent of change by underscoring the persistence of family structures in shaping migrant mobility post-migration (Botterill, 2013), their emergence through VFR and ICT’s (Baldassar, 2008), and the continued effect on home and migrant contexts through both social and financial remittances (Levitt, 2001). This work has helped to contribute to calls from research in VFR to follow previous understandings of friendship and kinship as separate entities (Janta et al., 2015; Seaton, 1994; Seaton & Tie, 2015). It is no doubt important to pay close attention to the voluntary versus institutional and heteronormative division of friendship and kinship. Considering the plethora of relationships that make up both friendship and kinship, studies that separate the two have an analytical advantage of depth between different types of relations within either kinship or friendship, for example between mother and child. I argue however, that it is precisely because
of the high volume of relationships that exist and the social and cultural currents that underlay them, that it is equally important to compare the kinds of bonds that make up kin and non-kin. It is therefore, important to recognize the general rise in understanding intimacy, the implicit blurring of kinship and friendship and different inter-articulations of commitment and connection.

This thesis seeks to destabilize the borders between friendship and kinship that Wikan’s (1990) ethnographic study deemed artificial. This study will build on research that has argued for the importance of comparing friendship and kinship, as it better facilitates inquiry into the makeup of relationships and how they are negotiated (Graham, 1979). Both forms of relationships are imbricated in economies of normative expectation and the ambiguity of practice within particular contexts. For instance, being a true friend or fulfilling family obligations can blur borders between friendship and kinship. Indeed, some friends are loved and feel a family-like responsibility for each other while some family members are not always loved or do not provide the support that may be normatively expected of them (Pahl & Spencer, 2010).

Furthermore, while this thesis finds the theoretical dispositions purporting the individualization, democratization and fragmentation of social relations highly nostalgic, the impact of globalization on reshaping social relations renders comparison between kinship and friendship all the more relevant. This understanding also reflects broader changes that have been captured over the past twenty years within the literature on kinship and friendship. Since Bourdieu, stemming from critiques of kinship from feminism and queer theory and changes from assisted reproductive technology, the biological reproductive and heterosexual underpinnings of kinship are being decentered from research (Peletz, 1995). In anthropology, traditional understandings of kinship as the foundation of social relations are being questioned, with research using friendship as a means to interrogate and extend the multitude of relationships among tribal societies (Santos-Granero, 2007). Research into friendship is taking on increased importance, for example on the heightened importance of friendship from urbanization (Amin & Thrift, 2002). Debates on the potential for real (Briggle, 2008) or unreal (Cocking & Mathews, 2000) forms of friendship on the internet are also growing in importance. Moreover, research into the role friendship plays in blurring tourism and migration with examples like backpacking (Allon & Anderson, 2009) or migrating (Conradson & Latham, 2010) is also becoming salient. At a general theoretical level, assumptions on the divisions of different relationships, their
constitution, and the role generating different forms of sociality across a number of social places and spaces are being questioned (Carsten, 2004; Smart, 2007).

To a certain extent, there is fruitful insight that has shown the changes in social relations often associated with the pessimistic assumptions of individualization and fragmentation as built from tensions between traditional normative structures and de-traditionalization of social bonds that emerge heterogeneously. The shift to post-Fordist economies, while not entirely new, has equated to the formation of identities outside class structures and is leading to new understandings of lifestyle or the deepening of selves through processes of reflexive aestheticization (Lash & Urry, 1994). While this could be construed as individualization and fragmentation, recent research has demonstrated that the furthing of lifestyle identities, even at a distance, also includes the continued development of ties to friends and family and the sense of belonging through those bonds (Duncan et al., 2014). Thus, while there may be new forms of agency and choice in regard to personal relationships, this does not necessarily equate to the tired assertion that social bonds are losing quality. This thesis argues that we pay more attention to how the boundaries and importance of certain personal relations are re-drawn in a context of reflexive modernization and development of non-linear life courses (Budgeon, 2006). Care for example, certainly extends beyond the family (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004), making visits and ICT’s sites for potential shifts in relations of care, enjoyment and identity. By comparing friendship and kinship as it pertains to VFR and ICT practices, this dissertation will be better able to delineate the micro-social worlds of personal communities (Pahl & Spencer, 2010) that will better facilitate an analysis of the kinds of bonds that are emerging from VFR and ICT practices.

3.4 Commitments of Friendship and Kinship as Politics, Performance and Personal Life

There is still little research that reveals the types of bonds emerging from migrants VFR and ICT practices with friends and family living at various sites across transnational networks. Furthermore, there is also too little research that helps explain the shifting borders of kinship and friendship. One potential avenue of inquiry is looking at keeping in touch at different moments of the life course as a politics of performance of personal life. In many ways, Derrida’s point on friendship, that relations always carry with them a politics that is steered by tensions between the potential for an enemy or intimacy, also extends to family (see for example Humbracht, 2015).
While kinship obligations and normative structures may more heavily impact family than friends, there can be no denying that kinship is a negotiated experience (Carsten, 2004; Morgan, 2011) that is highly performative (Van Vleet, 2008). Moreover, after migration, while some friends may fade, friends who keep in touch reported deeper relationships that in some ways resemble family (Cronin, 2014). Thus, this thesis follows previous research that has called for a move away from researching friendship and kinship as separate entities, or families as institutions but instead for researching personal life (Smart, 2007) or personal communities (Pahl & Pevalin, 2005). Personal life entails understanding family forms and relationships, reconfigured kinship networks and friendship as constituted from reflexive agents, forms of relatedness, imagination and inter-subjective relations (Smart, 2007). To grasp the sociality of VFR and ICT’s, and investigate the varying articulations of expectation, commitment, freedom, and the constitution of self and others between friendship and kinship, further research could focus on the intimacy and commitment within personal lives produced through relations of politics and performance.

There has been important research done on VFR and ICT’s in separation that sheds light on intimacy and social bonds. In VFR, and in relation to a reflexive politics and divides of feeling at ‘home’ or away, research has been completed on the host experience (Griffin, 2013; Uriely, 2010) or family and friends experiences when families come to visit (Shani & Uriely, 2010). This research has been particularly useful in calling attention to the delicate politics of feeling at home, versus relations becoming overly intimate, and thus an inability to construct spaces of comfort across transnational space. In addition, a recent study has shown that there is an intricate identity politics between friends and family, that is negotiated during visits of friends and family to migration contexts, which helps delineate processes of strengthening relations across transnational space through the work of the imagination and embodied practice (Humbracht, 2015). These studies, however, mostly considered relations as bounded through the temporal and spatial confines of physical visits, and did not consider the role ICT’s play in performing identities during visits.

There has also been research that considers both friends and family, and the intersection of VFR and ICT’s. Larsen et al (2008) have conducted the most far reaching research thus far. Their research built from Manuel Castell’s concepts of the network and mobile communications
society (Castells, 1996, 2007). This research demonstrates that VFR (largely in a domestic context) is imbricated in changes of social time, in that the meetings between friends and family are changing from being organized according to clock time to flexible time through perpetual coordination via e-mail and mobile communications and physical movement. Elliott and Urry (2010) also contributed to understandings of highly mobile lives and the reformation of intimacy in personal relations. Of particular note from this research, is the insight that the constitution of self and sociability for most middle class people living in western contexts is dependent upon and constitutive of mobility systems of information technologies (Elliott & Urry, 2010; Germann Molz, 2012). This research has helped to shed light on the temporal and spatial blurring of boundaries of physical and virtual mobility through VFR. It did not, however, assist with understanding changes, and blurring the types of relationships themselves or how physical mobilities and moorings are enmeshed with virtual mobilities and moorings in migration contexts or distanciated relationships of transnational space. Furthermore, in drawing mostly from social network analysis between individuals, the work has been criticized for not doing enough to move beyond individualization, in that network analysis does not allow for theorizing relational and collective affinities (Holdsworth, 2013).

Research into migration and ICT use also offers insight into the quality and formation of bonds. Baldassar’s research on Italian migrants in Australia is instructive. Her work has demonstrated that emotional dimensions of care, as one aspect of family life, can be equated to a form of labor between family members in Australia and Italy and the role VFR and ICT’s play in generating economies of emotional care and support amongst kin (Baldassar, 2007b, 2008). Her research substantiates the claim made in the introduction that bonds continue to play an important role in kin networks post-migration, generated mostly through VFR and ICTs. Most significant is her claim that the emotional labor that takes place manifests discursively, physically, and through practice and imagination, and that bonds are made up of virtual, proxy, physical and imagined forms of co-presence. By proxy, she means that during initial migration, return visits, and also during visits from kin to Australia, objects are exchanged and embedded in space that offer proxy emotional support.

However, in thinking of keeping in touch as politics and performance, there is still little understanding of the politics of bidirectional flows of physical and digital VFR. More research is
needed that teases out the power dynamics and politics of control and freedom linked to normative structures of kinship and friendship that are implicit to bonds of togetherness that are stretched across transnational space. This approach understands kinship and friendship as fluid and negotiated practices where relationship identities are something you do not something you are (Morgan, 2011), but that are continually informed by normative structure (Miller, 2007).

A similar approach was employed by Madianou and Miller in developing their notion of polymedia (2011). Polymedia problematizes what Madianou and Miller termed the ideal relationship or notions of kinship based on physical proximity that inform more distanced relationships and generate perceptions that the main problem with relationships is absence. In other words, perceptions that if families were closer things would be better, but polymedia improves the situation. In Madianou and Miller’s study of Philippine migrant mothers in London and children in the Philippines, there is a tension between normative notions of motherhood that suggest a mother should be nurturing and provide care, all within a certain physical proximity, and the independence they have fostered since migrating. In fact, many mothers affirm they would not want to return to the Philippines even if possible, because they value their independence. Thus, emotion certainly forms a significant part of the infrastructure of expectation but in parallel to the political economy of control and freedom generated from tensions between cultural norms of motherhood and migrant identities that lead to formations of co-presence.

Also, an important point from this approach is that the agency of individuals has been overstated in arguments of individualization (Pahl & Pevalin, 2005). In this view, relationships still take on different meanings with age or over time, and according to norms related to gender, marital status and class. Women in Britain, for example, have tended to be closer to family members rather than a friend after being married (Pahl & Pevalin, 2005). However, people who are currently single or living without a partner tend to de-center family or sexual partners for friendships (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). In relation to keeping in touch, norms surrounding children also appear to be important (Janta et al., 2015). Of course in Madianou and Miller’s study (2011) children are the most significant motivation for keeping touch for migrant mothers. In VFR, visits can be motivated by cultural transference to children (von Koppenfels et al., 2015). Children can also be a motivation for increased digital and physical VFR from different
friends and family (Humbracht, 2015). In adulthood, Baldassar concludes that (2007b, 2008) practices of keeping in touch were most prominent between Italian mothers and daughters. Therefore, a critical means for investigating blurring borders of friendship and kinship is to understand how different relationships are mobilized, immobilized and negotiated using digital and physical VFR and according to the different situations within the life course, such as living alone, marriage and having children.

Furthermore, this literature has shed light on intersections and negotiations of gender and class. In regard to family and gender, a growing body of literature (Baldassar, 2008; Hochschild, 2013; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Levitt, 2001; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Parrenas, 2005; Pessar, 1999; Uteng & Cresswell, 2008) has acknowledged the role gender plays in shaping transnational relationships, including the gendering of keeping in touch. Gender relations amongst family may not dwindle despite physical distance. Thus, in addition to post-migration moments, and the dynamics of relationships at different statuses in the life course, attention should be paid to how keeping in touch is gendered. As with Baldassar this could equate to mothers and daughters fulfilling roles of maintaining relationships. Importantly however, attention is needed to understanding if flows are weighted in one direction. Traditional parent and child hierarchies can remain important (Pahl & Spencer, 2010). Politics of control thus may favor parents resulting in children enacting most physical practices of keeping in touch as in O’Dell’s (2004) research or keeping in touch may be balanced and based on equality in line with arguments by Giddens notion of the pure relationship (1992). In addition, attention must also be paid to the productive power relationships between forms of travel. If, for example, family do not enact physical travel they might use digital technology to keep in touch. This dynamic is important for how relationships are experienced and negotiated.

In regard to friends, there is also evidence that physical proximity or frequency of contact may not be important to perceptions of closeness or satisfaction. Instead, relationships can be judged according to how they create assurances, openness (Johnson, 2009) and the strength of how they are felt (Cronin, 2014). What creates feelings of strength and openness could be rooted in time, as old friendships are more likely to hold up against change as opposed to new friendships (Elliott & Urry, 2010). Friendships for women, however, can fade as they become tied to childcare (Cronin, 2014) or enter new romantic relationships (Cronin, 2014; Rose &
Felicitisima, 1986). Furthermore, young adult migrants can prize keeping friendships over family networks (Conradson & Latham, 2010). Thus, contrasting binaries of old/new, mixed-sex/same sex friends could be important to understand and in relation to different moments in the life course across networks. In addition, social class may partially configure the norms by which individuals practice and assess friendship, where common activities play a strong role in constructing those norms (Cronin, 2014; Pahl & Pevalin, 2005; Walker, 1995). Because friends are at a distance and unable to enact daily maintenance behaviors, the practices that occur during physical visits in contrast to virtual practices may be important.

3.5 Togetherness as Reimaging Self, Performance and Fantasy in Migrant Personal Communities

Investigating intersections of ethnicity, gender and class as performative politics underpinning practices of VFR and ICTs across relationships of friendship and kinship is no doubt important, and indeed this thesis recognizes the importance and need for further research in how these politics emerge in relationships utilizing VFR and ICTs. We also need to make room, however, for research that seeks to advance understandings of social and cultural life that does not begin by drawing from theories of structural difference (Moore, 2011). In focusing on the politics of keeping in touch, we are left with conceptualizations of togetherness that can view agents as over determined by deep structures of family or friends norms, whether based on cultural traditions, individualization or somewhere in between. We have a limited range of understanding with the above theories, in that on one side togetherness is viewed as formed by migrants who simply follow the rules in ambiguous contexts, or perhaps attempt to both follow and resist norms by enacting practices that foster ways of being as together and apart. Forming responsibilities and obligations to others though, may have little to do with obedience to moral codes but more with the formation of an ethical self and affective fantasies. Indeed, Hanna (2015) et al have argued that Foucault’s work has shown the manner in which individuals experience themselves and others through the exercise of care for the self and how they form responsibilities, compassion, and obligations to others. Furthermore, we have to ask ourselves how much do widely accepted notions in academia like together and apart make sense to people in how they understand their everyday relationships? We need to pay attention to how people create ethical relations of self, to self, and in how they foster relational and intersubjective ethics of commitments, duties and rights with others that may pay heed to moral codes but ultimately
come to express how individuals give form to self as an art of existence.

To operationalize this research focus while working within the realm of personal life, this thesis aims to investigate the interconnection between the ethical constitution of migrant selves and the performative practices of VFR and ICTs within highly skilled migrant personal communities. Personal communities is a term coined by Pahl and Spencer (2010) whose work over several years was aimed at researching fusions and commitments between kinship and friendship. A personal community is “a set of personal relationships that a person considers important for him or her at a particular time” (pg.205). These sets can include a variety of different relationships from best friends, family, extended family, colleagues or a boss, leisure friends, online friends etc. Importantly, a personal community differs from a social network in that it focuses on a single person. Also, it does not entail the full range of contacts a person may have, but simply the ones a person finds important. In sum, this form of research aims to incite informants to construct and detail personal communities for themselves by describing a range of key relationships and their importance, that ranges from histories, qualities of relationships, forms of commitment, and how relationships are attributed meanings through practices of ICTs and VFR. This approach, in combination with Moore’s’ notion of the ethical imagination detailed in the previous chapter, will help to conceptualize how clusters of identities such as migrant, son/daughter, best friend, etc., get bound together in developing ethical selves. What more, the approach will delineate how these identities frame the importance of certain relationships, what is important about those relationships, how selves are recognized in practice, what counts as important about practices, and how the performative experience of practice in turn shapes formations of care for the self. Or better, how the development of migrant selves is linked to transformations and re-imaginings of kinship and friendship and in how people develop new possibilities for thinking and acting towards others across transnational space using ICTs and VFR.

In order to effectively investigate the formation of a relational ethics, the research will follow previous work that has sought to compare perspectives between migrants and loved ones when keeping in touch (Baldassar, 2007b; Madianou & Miller, 2011). This approach has proved important in understanding how migrant subjectivities and those of loved ones are reconstituted through discursive and embodied dimensions of visits (Humbracht, 2015) as well as ICT
practices. In addition, research on personal communities has been overly focused on views from individuals that, as noted above, can reinforce understandings of individualization in that data mirrors ontological dynamics between individuals. Thus, the aim here is to investigate relationships that individuals deem important. These may be individual connections or a series of relationships tied to a group like family, or a group of leisure friends or colleagues, and then compare perspectives between migrants and those of important people.

Furthermore, this thesis aims to build on research within mobilities studies that has sought to conceptualize the relational production of mobility and immobility (Cresswell, 2010). Thus, comparing perspectives aids in comparing friendship and kinship patterns in that this approach can tease out ethical economies of mobilities and immobilities of a diverse array of means to keep in touch that articulates different levels of participation and relational attachment. This helps flesh out relationships not simply as normative categories but as practiced through a variety of different mobilities and immobilities of physical and digital co-presence.

Lastly, as seen above, an important thread in research on personal communities and on the blurring of kinship and friendship has been the life course. This literature has identified the construction of life course moments as a crucial factor in fusing different meanings that overlap kinship and friendship. In addition, a key pillar within life course studies is researching the manner in which life course identities are fostered through the relational linking of lives (of various different relationships) over time (Elder, et al. 2002). The focus on linked lives, and indeed the life course, is also gaining attention across the social sciences. The emphasis on linked lives and the life course has been drawn into and coincided with the rise in focus on mobilities studies and viewing migration as a process (Findlay, McCollum, Coulter, & Gayle, 2015; Marcu, 2017). In viewing migration as a process, attention has been drawn to how migration is constituted through the relational linking of couples or other groups who migrate together, the relationship between those who move and those who stay and relational developments between migrants whether in proximity or at a distance (Findlay et al., 2015). Thus, this thesis aims to strategically position the research between what has been termed the ethical turn in personal relationships (Morgan, 2011), the emphasis on migration and tourism mobilities as process (Sheller & Urry, 2006) and the linking of lives through the life course. The thesis argues for examining how the linking of different lives through practices of keeping in
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touch contributes to defining relationships and migrants as ethical subjects at different intersections of the life course and migration process.

3.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to position research on highly skilled migrants and socialities of keeping in touch in relation to key literature on friendship, kinship and VFR. The chapter began by reviewing some of the foundational theories on kinship and friendship. Theory on kinship has been a major concern of Sociology and Anthropology over time and has had a major impact on the theoretical orientations of both disciplines. The chapter first understood migrant socialities in relation to the work of Claude Levi-Strauss (1969) who argued that subjects perceive the world in relation to binary opposites that are attributed meaning within fixed symbolic systems of alliance and communication. From there the chapter considered Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) Marxist understanding of kinship and arguments on social and cultural capital. The chapter then explored some of the more classic accounts of friendship that ranged from Aristotle and the importance of friendship in the polis to Derrida’s more deconstructionist account of friendship. Overall, the chapter argues that most of the more classic literature on friendship and kinship provides a view of migrant socialites that is overly static, disembodied or overly oriented towards cultural re-productions of the past. In addition, much of this literature could be seen as evidence for not researching both friendship and kinship.

More recent literature however, that has linked kinship and friendship to globalization, has argued that kinship or family as a formal institution is being democratized in parallel to process of deterritorialization that produces high levels of reflexivity. Family relationships are said to be governed more by choice between autonomous agents constructing individual biographies and friendship is said to resemble family with the rise of ‘families of choice’ (Giddens, 1992). This has contributed to a shift in focus away from family as the pinnacle of key relationships (Carsten, 2004) to a focus on the importance of a wide variety of relationships in personal life and at different moments of the life course (Pahl & Spencer, 2010; Smart, 2007). This work has argued against Giddens by insisting on the continued relevance of social structures like class and gender while highlighting the importance of reflexive politics, embodied performance and contextual relatedness in relationships.
This thesis, though, argues that previous work has been overly focused on difference linked to moral dimensions of relationships that continues to prioritize binary forms of analysis and risks further developing nostalgic forms of conceptualization. This focus has diminished the contextual, relational and ethical dimensions of togetherness and how they are linked to migration as an entrepreneurial and creative formation of self. The thesis has therefore argued that in order to investigate socialities of ICTs and VFR that emerge within migrant networks the thesis will concentrate on investigating the personal communities of highly skilled migrants. Furthermore, the thesis will aim to compare perspectives between migrants and friends and family that will aide in understanding how relations and identities are reimagined at different moments of the life course through the construction of different inter-subjective and relational ethics. The chapter also argues for understanding how that relational ethics is intertwined in fostering embodied practices of ICTs and VFR that can produce affective fantasies of togetherness that attach selves to others. In order to explore this focus further though, the thesis requires more extensive exploration of intimacy and belonging than has been depicted. This will be the task of the following chapter.
4 Intimacy as Belonging in Socialities of Trans-Local Personal Communities

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter attempted to spell out the importance of understanding the ethics and performance of friendship and kinship that constitute practices of keeping in touch within migrant personal communities. In order to build on the theoretical direction of the thesis, this chapter will focus on how these themes relate to intimacy as belonging. The aim here is not to do a systematic literature review of intimacy and belonging. They consist of extensive literatures across multiple disciplines and thus such a task would prove challenging within the constraints of this thesis and unnecessary. In addition, this chapter will not review the entirety of the literature on ICTs and individual platforms in relation to intimacy and belonging. While useful, this thesis will instead focus on key literature regarding ICTs and VFR with regard to intimacy and belonging that crosses migration, tourism, and mobilities studies, and in consideration of what has already been discussed, in order to more efficiently focus the aims of the research.

In addition, this focus is guided by a general shift in theoretical attention within the social sciences that highlights the importance of intimacy in relation to the rise of research on affect, performance and emotion, and how this focus has raised questions about the continued importance of national forms of belonging (Baldassar & Gabaccia, 2011; Conradson & McKay, 2007). This context has produced arguments for better connecting understandings of belonging, social practice and forms of being (Fallon, Jorgensen, & Kundsen, 2013; Jensen, 2009; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Indeed, the interest in intimacy has related to conceptualizing different forms of co-presence that have been at the center of increased research of relations at a distance over the past decade (Cronin, 2014; Larsen, 2008; Urry, 2000; Walsh, 2009). Thus, this chapter aims to explore intimacy and belonging not necessarily as separate entities but investigate how affluent, highly skilled migrant personal communities form ethical relations through practices of ICT and VFR that constitute intimacy as belonging. The chapter begins by addressing the argument within the VFR tourism literature on separating friends from relatives and how this suggests viewing fundamentally different forms of intimacy.
4.2 VFR, ICT’s and Liquid Belonging

Within the VFR tourism literature, in labeling the phenomena some have called for the term VFR travel. These scholars argue that this term recognizes that VFR is divided between consumer practices and practices that are non-market orientated. This would seem to suggest that ethno-national identities and belongings have been undisturbed or are at least separate from market economies. This point parallels the migration literature and its focus on ethnic renewal through return visits and VFRs link to return migration (Jorgen, 2014; King & Vathi, 2011; Reynolds, 2011; Sagmo, 2014). The focus on ethnicity is also reflected in more recent research in tourism that has called for international perspectives on VFR that focuses on ethnicity and nationality (Backer & King, 2015). This economically orientated research would point to seeing visits possibly as containing both consumer oriented practices and ethnic kin/friend meanings grounded in an essentialist ontology of belonging.

The above argument though, has not been explicitly linked to debates regarding people’s ability to connect with others, form intimate relations and constitute common notions of self and belonging within a context of expanding neo-liberalism (Hochschild, 1983, 2003, 2013; Illouz, 2007). As mentioned before, Bauman leveled the most sustained critique of dissolving intimate life that prevents collective belonging and whose arguments point to a blurring of meanings.

At first glance, affluent and highly skilled migrants and their relationships with friends and family at a distance could appear to be the epitome of Bauman’s theoretical worldview (Walsh, 2009). Bauman’s theory has been integrated into Benson and O’Reilly’s (2009) notion of lifestyle migration. Lifestyle migrants are usually affluent westerners who migrate abroad in search of a better quality of life. Benson and O’Reilly’s view of lifestyle migrants argues that they seek to stylize their lives by moving abroad, pursing aesthetic and often quite romantic notions of place and the good life. Bauman’s argument (1992) points to lifestyle migration as a form of neo-tribalism linked to larger social and cultural processes of individualization (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) brought about by post-Fordist economies. Lifestyle migration could be seen as an adaptive response to the disaggregation of local sociality, collective belonging, and the resulting uncertainty that then creates increasingly isolated individuals and encourages an ethos of survivalism (Lury, 2011). Unlike some who argue belonging can be re-created through tribalism, Bauman’s ideas point to lifestyle migration as a phenomenon that dissolves belonging
by inciting migrants to cocoon themselves through ICT practices and never permitting relationships of kinship and friendship from afar to define their identity.

Bauman (2003) and Andrea Wittel (2001) believe that contemporary relationships are often articulated as commodities, in that they are easily deleted and thrown aside when they become too tight and restrictive or when they lose their value. According to these scholars, while solid bonds still exist, they are now highly heterodoxical when compared to now more dominant ephemeral and shallow connections. Moreover, Bauman believes the more our bonds are converted to connections, the more complicit relationships become to market forces that seek to commodify those connections. Skills of sociality are said to be crumbling away, leaving us in ‘agentic mode’, which makes us more inclined to search out identity in current market fashions. Broken free from normative kin and relationship structures, people are not subjects but are agents thrusting forward towards individualized notions of identity. Here, Bauman suggests that the greatest victory of the market thus far has been the erosion of responsibility. People no longer feel responsibility to others and are judged as consumer objects by the volume of pleasure they are likely to offer, or at best, as companions in the essentially solitary activity of consumption. People are fellows in the joys of consumption, whose presence and active participation serve to intensify those pleasures (Bauman, 2003).

Therefore, according to this view, spurred by uncertainty, affluent highly skilled migrants are seen as escaping their local contexts in a survivalist, agentic mode, with little sense of responsibility for the people and bonds they leave behind. Or perhaps the bonds they leave behind feel little responsibility towards them and begin to fade (Walsh, 2009). While voluntary migrants may pursue new relationships in new contexts that assist with place attachments (Walsh, 2009), both new relationships and maintaining the old ones, in Bauman’s view, would only have value to the extent they assist in fashioning a notion of self related to lifestyle. Lifestyle migration often involves maintaining relations through VFR and ICTs (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009). Bauman would say, however, that post-migration moments (if not before) old bonds have been converted to connections that don’t entail any enhancement of belonging; they are instead brief and intense moments that do not re-solidity into bonds and promote consumption.
4.3 The Rise of Intimacy, Emotional Worlds and the Blurring of the Everyday and the Extraordinary

As was discussed in the previous chapters, Bauman’s notion of liquid love has been resisted, if not rejected, by several scholars pursuing a relational approach to relationships within academia. While meanings of tourism and culture may be blurring, we need an approach more in tune with capturing the relational complexity of relationships. Important to note though, is how his notions of dissolving social structures link to debates and focus within academia that have brought intimacy and belonging into focus. As was described in the last chapter, Gidden’s (Giddens, 1992) argument highlighting the importance of intimacy over structures of meaning and authority acted as a precursor to an explosion of research on emotion, affect, performance and practice within the social sciences. Theory exploring relational ontologies has put intimacy and the emotional intimate worlds humans construct with each other, with objects, and virtual and natural environments center stage. In psychology, there is also research that has sought to decouple images of intimacy in popular culture predominantly related to sexuality. Instead, scholars argue that different forms of intimacy connect all types of relationships in different ways and become crucial to developing life skills across the life course (Skyler & Bayer, 2010). Thus, intimacy has become a core concern for researching social and cultural life.

The work of John Urry and others, in relation to mobilities research significantly aided in calling attention to a focus on intimacy, VFR and ICTs by focusing on co-presence. Resisting Bauman’s work, Larsen, Urry and Axhausen (2006a) focused on the co-presence formed through strong ties. They argue that co-presence is made up of five mobilities: physical travel, the travel of objects, imaginative travel, virtual (internet) travel and communicative mobilities as with letters, email messages, and Skype. Their work contributed to viewing relationships not as objective or constituted from essentialist selves but made and un-made through practices that constitute (im)mobilities of migration, tourism, leisure, working life, virtual and physical spheres. In parallel Urry (2000) argues for viewing feelings of belonging not in terms of a single place of dwelling but as created while circulating in and between places. His arguments echoed other notable concepts like elective belonging (Savage et al., 2005) that understands belonging as fluid, or where people attach themselves to multiple locations and see places as sites for performing multiple identities or belongings. Elective belonging also parallels arguments within media studies that electronic media and mobility have contributed to making the borders of the
private and public spheres permeable (Morley, 2000). In addition, this work reflected other scholars work on co-presence as mediated by emotion in that increased mobility entails the development of important emotional capacities and management that situates different forms of migration through the emotional labor required to negotiate lives on the move (Baldassar, 2008; Elliott & Urry, 2010). These scholars have highlighted how notions of self, linked to personal identity and collective belonging are mediated through forms of co-presence and emotional management while on the move and through moments of stillness.

Furthermore, the focus on practice, co-presence, and networks contributed to problematizing borders between the extraordinary and every day. Researchers linked intimacy and globalization to the blurring of the exotic and familiar, arguing globalization was fostering new relations of cultural intimacy with others that challenges notions and borders of belonging on an on-going basis (Herzfeld, 2005). This process underscores how the body and embodied mobilities have risen in importance to interrogate the insider/outsider divide through intimate cultural encounters such as those between leisure travelers and residents (Allon & Anderson, 2009). Thus, in researching VFR and ICTs as they pertain to migrant personal communities, this study is in part aimed at understanding how the exotic and extraordinary are constructed in intimate lives and between selves and others that may destabilize borders of the local and non-local and belonging and unbelonging.

Through this blurring we can begin to understand how different identities, notions of belonging and social relations are constituted. Scholarship related to tourism and migration, and to VFR has produced fruitful exploration of these processes of blurring. Williams and Hall (2002) began the discussion by detailing how shifts in production and consumption, related to tourism and migration, were connected to changes in economic and social trajectories due to the globalization of labor markets and the expanding circulation of capital and labor. The authors detailed new intricacies where, for example, tourism consumption can ‘tip into’ migration, migration can lead to tourism through instances like VFR or second home ownership can become a form of circulating consumer oriented migration. Building on this argument, O’Reilly (2003) questioned the ambiguity surrounding identities of tourist and migrant by stipulating that the inter-articulation of tourism and migration raises the question of ‘when is a tourist’? She cited examples such as UK retirement migration in Spain where her informants shift from practices
related to integrating into the local community to visiting places in the surrounding area or hosting and visiting the local environment with guests from the UK.

This work was furthered in relation to practices of physical VFR. VFR should not only be defined as a series of different typologies of visits enacted at different moments (Backer, 2007; Baldassar, 2008). Instead, VFR is better understood as consisting of different practices that are blurred (Janta et al., 2015) and often a cause of tension (Humbracht, 2015). For example, because visiting friends and family have limited holiday time and have to invest money in tickets (despite the fact that lodging can be free), they expect to be able to engage in leisure activities and enact tourist identities. Therefore, migrant hosts are often expected to package their daily lives into tourist experiences to be consumed by guests (Humbracht, 2015). Return visits are also marked by a tensions between familial expectations and personal interests like tourism, as migrants seek to balance a need to visit family and a desire to have some aspect of tourism (von Koppenfels et al., 2015). Thus, there is a fundamental ambiguity over mobile identities and how to attach identities and meanings of belonging and unbelonging within transnational networks.

There has been, however, little research within tourism and migration that links the blurring of the everyday and extraordinary, intimacy and belonging to ICTs. Considering the integration of ICTs into daily life, this thesis maintains that the nature of the subject, as it pertains to the constitution of tourist, migrant, or mobile identities, its situatedness in shifting social, cultural and economic structures, is significantly more complicated than has been represented thus far. A crucial point is that there is a need for attention to the manner in which people replicate everyday practices within seemingly exotic contexts and situations (Duncan et al., 2014) that provides a sense of familiarity and that can be made and remade across different contexts. Thus, migrants can be at ‘home in practice’ (Corvellec & O'Dell, 2012) through how they develop routines and rhythms of VFR and ICTs. In relation to VFR, Larsen has argued that intimacy and familiar practices shared on tourist trips with family or during VFR, fundamentally confound divisions of the everyday and the extraordinary (Larsen, 2008). In addition, Haldrup and Larsen (2010) have argued that ICTs have contributed to significant changes in perceptions of the everyday and exotic that draws together and co-mingles tourism practice with everyday life. These scholars have argued for understanding how technology and material objects create circuits of performance - where production and consumption processes converge and overlap in
complex ways both in everyday life and at tourist sites (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010). In doing so, they make the important point that one of the key features of contemporary social life is the persistent presence of the ‘Other’ in consumption and everyday life, that is connected to processes of touristification of everyday life and the colonization of everydayness in tourists’ performances (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010). In the context of this research, this work points to understanding migrant or distant others that are continually present through ICTs and VFR, as consumption, and how everyday practices from eating at local cafes to showing loved ones a local neighborhood during visits are framed through tourism.

The blurring of the extraordinary and the everyday has been further discussed in the VFR literature and in relation to tensions surrounding the public and private. VFR tourism can be a context in which both ‘home’ and ‘away’ are muddled together, including aspects of extraordinary and everydayness that can create difficulties surrounding privacy and the negotiation of intimacy (Ashtar, Shani, & Uriely, 2016; Shani & Uriely, 2010). Visits are contexts in which family and friends politics and expectations can cause tensions related to personal routines as well as challenges related to the everyday lives of hosts in migration contexts (Humbracht, 2015). This research, however, argues that binaries like home and away may not stand up to scrutiny when applied to different members of personal communities across time. By researching personal communities, this study will be better able to grasp how the extraordinary and mundane or home and away are constructed differently across relationships.

Furthermore, the implementation of programs like Skype, Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest into the daily lives of highly skilled migrants and friends and family (but not only the affluent) equates to the continuing presence of the lives of Others in daily life, the continued touristification of migrants daily lives and the injection of everyday life into VFR tourism. Cultivating elements of daily life for consumption occurs in VFR trips and can be bound up in the everyday through ICTs and notions of daily life that continue to be recoded and intertwined through channels of performance within relationships. Thus, visits may be about the renewal or affirmation of ethnic identities or roots (Duval, 2004; Janta et al., 2015) but VFR and ICTs are also crucial to creating notions of belonging through lifestyle migration (Duncan et al., 2014). We do, however, need to pay attention to the manner in which they are used for generating familiarly and Otherness in parallel to each other, before, during and after visits. Particularly in
regard to social media and the use of Skype, aspects of daily lives for both migrants and friends and family are regularly or selectively observed, discussed, and commented upon by migrants, juxtaposing alternative life scripts into daily life that then inform return visits and visits from friends and family.

4.4 Ethical Economies of Physical and Digital VFR

In order to explore personal communities and the blurring of the extraordinary and everyday, tourism and migration, as they pertain to constituting belonging and intimate relations at a distance, work on prosumption offers a potential avenue for investigation. Prosumption, or the blurring of producers and consumers, is a concept that is beginning to garner attention in academia. The term’s inception is linked to academic research on the rise of the cultural economy and different forms of immaterial labor (Lazzarato, 2004) that are expanding into everyday life.

4.4.1 Self Branding Prosumers: Physical and Digital Hosting

The thesis will first explore the notion of prosumption in regard to physical and digital hosting. Michel Foucault’s (1991) notion of the enterprising self, that is part of his more broader work on governmentality, and Alison Hearn’s (2008) concept of self-branding will aid in this discussion. The enterprising self refers to Foucault’s arguments that the self is governed through both autonomy and enterprise; these key features are the means through which power relationships are established that simultaneously resist and align the self with overarching political economies. This occurs through the self-establishing a series of objectives, strategies for meeting those objectives and self-disciplining practices that actualize these goals. Enterprising selves become key actors within neo-liberalism, expressed not only through a retreat from collectivity and public spheres but also through a normalizing of individual entrepreneurship (or our activities that articulate the self through neoliberal logic) and the branding of the neoliberal self (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). Thus, it is not simply that social realms have become recoded as economic but that individuals have themselves become reconstituted as economically productive (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). The branding of self, equates to a self that is purposeful, directed outward, heavily narrated, marked by the visual codes of the mainstream culture industry and subject to the extraction of value (Hearn, 2008).

Digital and physical hosting and the links between them are instances that need to be
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explored in relation to the enterprising self. Digital and physical hosting in VFR, through social media, blogs, and communication platforms offer rich grounds for exploring the (de)commodification of everyday life. It is through both forms of hosting that highly skilled migrants and their friends and family reflexively extract aspects of daily life and fashion them in highly subjective ways. Hosting needs to be explored as a form of both labor and consumption, as both forms of hosting can potentially position subjects as both consumers and producers. Further clarification however, of the link between value, labor and production, and commodification, and how these processes are connected to political economies is needed.

One avenue of investigation is the manner in which the lives of highly skilled migrants and their friends and family are objectified into a commodity through the prosumer construction of identity and social relations. After migration, ICTs are an important means through which friends and family keep in touch. Baldassar (2008) has already pointed out that ICTs and VFR are a kind of emotional labor. This is an important point as it demonstrates one aspect of how post-fordist economic structures, that lead to affluent migration, are at least in part sustained and coded according to culture (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). This happens in part through the emotional and affective economies of longing and support.

These processes should be viewed in terms of digital VFR. In the first place, online identities act as a form of digital hosting and self-branding that is done in order to keep in touch with, and indeed attract, friends and family. Online sites are used to produce inventories for branded selves - their logic encourages users to see themselves and others as commodity signs to be collected and consumed in the social marketplace (Hearn, 2008). This line of thought points to an understanding of on-line hosting as converting the offline world of highly skilled migrants and friends and family into online identities. Digital hosting can be explored as digital labor, or prosumption, where migrants are both the laborers and consumers that shape and choose certain aspects of everyday life for digital representations of self. It is also important to understand the motivations or strategies behind certain representations of self that could provide theoretical insight into how the mobility capital (Bell, 2013) of highly skilled migrants is simultaneously generated and converted into network capital through online communication (Vergeer & Pelzer, 2009). This could also offer clues as to how migrants perceive themselves in relation to others across their transnational network.
In addition, digital hosting needs to be understood in relation to physical hosting as a form of self-branding. Objectified, online identities can be performed offline during visits, both in terms of how hosting is performed and the ways in which relationships have developed as a result of on-line communication. As Baldassar (2008) suggests, physical VFR, and thus hosting, is no doubt a form emotional labor or ‘care work.’ Physical hosting may also be a form of prosumption. As was mentioned earlier, in contexts where friends and family visit voluntary migrants, hosting can involve the packaging of daily life into commodity form that is consumed by both hosts and guests (Humbracht, 2015). Here, the everyday is converted into the extraordinary and highly skilled migrant experiences are fetishized and given market value by migrants and those who come to visit. We do not yet know, however, how this economy of producing the everydayness and extraordinary plays out in both returns visits and visits to migration contexts. Important to understand is how relationships and selves that have been developed online impact visits and acts of hosting offline, and how the politics of relations and communication technology spill over into physical space.

4.4.2 Visiting Online and Offline and the Consumption of Everyday Life

The manner in which physical and digital visiting involves consumption is also important to understand. In regard to visiting on-line this thesis takes inspiration from David Morley and his ideas on the construction of identities through intersections of mobility, communications and cultural consumption. Morley stipulates that technologies both transgress the boundaries of the household – bringing the public world into the private – and simultaneously produce the coherence of broader social experience, through the sharing both of media time and ritual (2000). Furthermore, integral to processes that produce sociality and coherence is the politics that are generated in the process of identity formation by attempting to expel or domesticate alterity; of defining what belongs and what does not belong (Morley, 2000).

Morley’s insights into identity, media, consumption and belonging provide a useful approach to understanding highly skilled migrants and the rise of user-generated content. The formation of co-presence through ICTs is a large part of how the relational and emotional geographies of migrants and their friends and family are constituted. Creating common ICT routines and practices at a distance collapse the spatial and temporal barriers that inform the construction of new domesticities and communal ontologies. What’s more, blogs, and social
media sites promote an almost live sense of co-presence by affording friends and family the potential to observe and comment on each other’s lives on a continual basis.

In the process, private and intimate lives are made public, transgress borders and juxtapose situated subjectivities. The Other, and scripts of other lives become familiar and overlaid onto the everyday, enabling friends and family to consume alterity from the comfort of an armchair (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010). Digital VFR (but also physical) aids in the production of in between spaces that traps subjects between micro and macro worlds by aligning the imaginations of friends and family (Appadurai, 1996). Of the utmost importance for this thesis is not only how imaginations are synchronized but also de-synchronized, or understanding what Apparduari (2013) has termed the bumps of globalization that occur in connecting imaginations.

The bumps of globalization apply to both physical and digital visits. Here I wish to imply that consuming the lives of Others and being connected can lead to conflict over difference, potentially damaging relations. Belonging may be created through digital and physical VFR, and alterity may be folded into daily life, however, unbelonging may also be created and alterity reinforced and expanded. Even more likely are different rhythms and moments of belonging and unbelonging, and processes of creating difference and sameness. For instance, during the same return visit, migrants may engage in preferential consumption such as eating foods that are not available in countries of migration but also use social media to photograph and post on-line what is different. Through consumption, processes of creating belonging and unbelonging exist in parallel. Furthermore, technologies have different material and social affordances. Some friends and family might use Skype but display anxieties around social media, while others may employ both or combinations of platforms. Leveraging technology in different ways, between different people, shapes how relationships and affinities are constituted. Micro level ontological politics may result in tensions and anxieties between family and friends, potentially damaging relations (Miller, 2012).

The point here is that both digital and physical VFR are travel technologies that afford the consumption of everyday life, mediate sameness, difference and migration experiences, and shape the relationships that constitute socialities. In contrast to migration scholarship that has sought to investigate similar issues (Baldassar, 2008; Botterill, 2013; Fortunati et al., 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2011), this thesis argue these issues can be explored through a lens of
prosumption. The processes of maintaining relationships through VFR and ICTs need to be explored in relation to the touristification of migration experiences: or investigating how migrant identities, and those of friends and families are inflected through market logics to further relationships at a distance that make and unmake belonging.

4.4.3 Making love in the Global Village

Maintaining and furthering relationships should not, however, be seen simply as articulating commodity logic but how people give form to self through exploiting a variety of different representations that cross economic and cultural spheres. Bauman’s argument that relations are reduced to connections that erode the moral make-up of relations and dissipate responsibility towards friends and family is not supported in the literature on VFR and voluntary migration (Baldassar, 1997, 2007b, 2008; Botterill, 2013; Humbracht, 2015; Madianou & Miller, 2011; O'Dell, 2004; von Koppenfels et al., 2015). Further understanding of how informants develop entrepreneurial selves through combining both commodity forms, in parallel to kinship and friendship is needed.

Both return visits and visits to migration contexts, for instance, may not involve obligation or expectations. Return visits may be linked to motivations for example, of business, or visits to migrants from friends and family maybe more for tourism, and in both cases a visit is simply added on (Baldassar, 2008). In addition, the plethora of relationships between migrants and friends and family that exists in virtual space (excluding one to one contact though), perhaps even the majority, maybe simply voyeurism with no felt presence (Cronin, 2014) or obligation to maintain relations. The crucial point however, is that many relationships that generate both physical and digital VFR are ethical in nature and have a potentially important impact on migrants and friends and family as subjects situated in transnational space.

In regard to the practices that make up digital and physical VFR one of the key problems with Bauman’s thesis on the fragmentation and commodification of bonds is an inability to recognize the contradictory and paradoxical nature of contemporary society: that we depend on commodities to complete our daily lives, yet we find it necessary to decommoditize objects and services if we want our activities to have meaning for us as human beings (Sassatelli, 2007). If the consumer society is that in which daily needs are satisfied in a capitalist way through commodities, it is also that in which each consumer has to constantly engage in reevaluating
commodities in order to stabilize meanings and social relations (Sassatelli, 2007).

Daniel Miller’s work on consumption has helped to understand how relations and consumption in VFR go beyond market meaning. The subheading of this section is intended as an allusion to the first chapter ‘making love in supermarkets,’ of Miller’s book *A Theory of Shopping* (1998). One of the main points of the book is to counter arguments that view shopping simply as act of individualistic consumer drudgery by demonstrating how shopping is actually a practice of sacrifice and means through which people express relationships. People work on possessions and services to make them very personal and expressive of specific values and relationships; this is what makes them part of what we call culture, so that ‘consumer culture’ is not a contradiction in terms (D. Miller, 2012).

As was mentioned above, Baldassar’s work on VFR and ICT’s was important in detailing many of these processes through what she called ‘kin work,’ is linked to growing literature on the commodification of emotions and care (Hochschild, 1983, 2003; Illouz, 2007; Micaela, 1987). This work has highlighted several areas of contemporary society where the intimate, private, and emotional sphere of life is inflected through capitalism, and the ways in which capitalism is becoming increasingly emotional. One missing aspect, however, from Baldassar’s work is a more complete understanding of value. Her work makes clear that value is created from emotional labor and that migration involves ‘kinwork’ to sustain it. Her work does not, however, fully spell out how processes of producing market consumer value and ethics of value happen in parallel to each other.

Highly skilled migration produces virtual and physical VFR, and may lead to prosumption that combines values of family and friendship. Digital hosting such as creating a blog or using social media to keep in touch with friends and family can create a branded self and act as a means to express loyalty and affirm common identities through sharing information and generating content that connects imaginations. These processes, though, can exclude some across networks who are unable or unwilling to integrate them into daily life. Moreover, there is still little research that explains understanding of programs like Skype, Whatsapp, and Dropbox that afford possibilities like constant communication and photo file sharing. These programs carry the potential for relationships to be developed through co-presence but also to be projected into physical space and leveraged in different ways to create social coherence.
Physical hosting can equally be an act of self-branding or of expressing values of personal relationships. The planning that goes into hosting specifically involves the interpretation of individual tastes and interests (Humbracht, 2015). This may be true in both return visits and during visits to migration contexts. In addition, hosting in both types of visits may involve a number of activities such as organizing preferential consumption for visitors, or finding different material resources. Thus, while digital and physical VFR may objectify selves and create market value, it may also objectify values of personal relationships.

The same could be said about visiting. Visiting on-line and off-line needs to be investigated not simply as a form of maintenance ritual but out of a sense of responsibility to the deepening of intimacy that impacts how both migrants and friends and family view their mobility or immobility (Cronin, 2014). This applies to both friends and family and is expressive of a variety of meanings such as care, affinity, solidarity and gratitude. Visiting friends and family online and offline, during return visits and visits to migrant contexts, constitutes imagined space that may happen to a large extent through consumption, no matter how brief, and that can nonetheless express a desire for and create intimacy. Hochschild (2013) has noted that while neoliberalism has been on the rise, there has also been a rising salience of certain moral and ethical sentiments such as loyalty, gratitude, sacrifice, and commitment which reflect an effort to counter growing uncertainty by affirming ties that bind.

In this section, the thesis has sought to offer a potential avenue for exploring the blurring of the everyday and the extraordinary as it pertains to the development of intimacy and belonging in digital and physical VFR. Instead of viewing intimacy and relations as commodification, a more fruitful avenue would be to understand how informants constitute the self, relationships and belonging by drawing on forms that cross meanings of culture and market within particular contexts of the life course.

4.5 Trans-local Ethical and Embodied Fantasies for Belonging within Personal Communities

The fact that ethical or moral relations of kinship and friendship and market contexts inform each other, however, is perhaps not surprising. The literature thus far helped to detail how relations of both ethical and market values might be generated in interesting ways through VFR and ICTs. While hosting and guesting online and offline is no doubt important, there is also a
risk that in focusing on prosumption we may not move far enough away from binaries of tradition versus culture. In addition, while ethical and market economies are likely produced from VFR and ICTs and no doubt overlap, we still do not understand how to make sense of the ethics of selves and practices that constitute intimacy as belonging. To address this issue, it may be helpful to delineate the scale of the research and how that might better focus the study.

As mentioned, a key argument related to challenging the borders of belonging and identity has been in regard to national identity. Herzfeld (2005) has insisted for the continued importance of the nation, arguing that even as globalization challenges national belonging through increasing intimate proximity with others, the nation state is also flexible and able to incorporate historical contexts that contribute to reinforcing and reproducing the nation. Instead, within migration studies, several prominent researchers have argued for understanding belonging as constructed transnationally, emphasizing belonging between nations. Using a Bourdieu inspired approach, for instance, Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) have suggested belonging is linked to transnational social fields, defined through a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relations through which ideas, practices and resources are unequally exchanged, organized and transformed.

More recent work within migration and mobilites studies have attempted to shift the focus from the transnational to the translocal, to highlight the importance of intimacy and micro-level belonging. This work points to how the term transnational has become heavily linked to labour, forms of capital and the more overt politics of citizenship that can deemphasize the local to local connections between social relations that may be unrelated to the national in either sending or receiving countries (Baldassar and Garbaccia, 2013). Thus, this thesis argues for a focus on the translocal and the formation of translocal subjectivities that calls specific attention to “the fidelity and commitment that most transnational migrations continue to feel towards family, friends and community in particular locations” (Conradson & McKay, 2007, p. 168). Such a focus helps reinforce inquiry into personal communities that cross national, regional and local borders. In addition, the translocal emphasis aids in conceptualizing how informants find belonging through the important relationships of friends and family, and how they might possess memories and develop qualities and intimacies that connect or disconnect biographies over time.
What is needed is a notion of belonging based in part on what people do, as part of an ongoing process connected to life course changes that alter biographies (Fallov et al., 2013) within translocal personal communities. This entails recognizing belonging as constituted through the (im)mobilities of physical, virtual, imagined and affective forms of co-presence. By including affect and imagination, the research helps understand how informants draw on imaginations of the past to help construct common imaginations of the present that are also intertwined with feelings or nostalgia for local places and ties rather than the nation state (Wessendorf, 2011). In part, this framework helps understand how ways of belonging combine action and awareness of the kind of identity that action signifies (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). In addition, this approach recognizes that belonging is constructed not only through awareness but through the intimacies of a mobile taken-for-grantedness, configured through the constitution of the rhythms of mobility and immobility (Fallov et al., 2013).

It should be noted, though, that both co-presence and personal communities have been criticized for their inability to conceptualize intimacy. On one side, Holdsworth (2013) has argued for not focusing on co-presence as dyadic relations, and particularly within networks, fail to capture collective affinities. She insists co-presence actually reinforces conceptualizations of individualization by focusing on the needs of individuals and ignoring the qualities and inequalities of intimacy that are constituted collectively. On the other side, Blatterer (2014) has pushed for avoiding analysis of networks or personal communities. He has suggested that they are unable to grasp intimacy and qualities like freedom, which are implicit to friendship, because they extend too far into analyzing a variety of relationships. Instead, he recommends focusing extensively on dyadic relationships. This thesis argues that for a truly relational approach we need analysis between those relationships that form collective affinities and more dyadic relations that may appear unconnected. The intimate relations and patterns of (im)mobility between certain family members may come to frame a relationship with a strong friendship. The qualities of relationships may emerge relationally between dyadic relations and collectivities in such a way that they inform how people imagine selves, the development of personal biographies and connections to others. In addition, while Blatterer’s point is important, as was suggested in last chapter, this thesis will not analyze in depth the complete variety of relationships that exist within personal communities but aim to interrogate those that informants find most important as an attempt to grasp the qualities of strong ties instead of weak ties (Larsen et al., 2006a).
4.5.1 Sociality, Ethical Life Course Trajectories and Embodied Rhythms of Intimacy and Belonging

In focusing on ethical, imagined and affective dimensions of ICT and VFR practices within migrant translocal personal communities, it is important to distinguish between affect as nostalgia and fantasy. Ignoring thinking that might reinforce binaries between tradition and markets carries the risk of viewing keeping in touch as nostalgia for capitalism and capitalist nostalgia (Appadurai, 1996) or producing and consuming traditional imaginations of kinship and friendship without ever having experienced them directly. This view however, overlooks the aspirational quality of desires for intimacy. When one begins to form an ethical self, like a migrant self, that can be developed through personal relationships, one also constructs desire – and desires are always hopeful (Berlant, 2011; Moore, 2011). This thesis argues for understanding affect not as nostalgia but as fantasy or as an aspirational form of intimacy. This helps emphasize not a search for feelings of past selves necessarily, although imaginations of the past are important, but as a means to articulate possibilities for intimate relations between friends and family in the present. Fantasy plays a key role in creating and maintaining forms of identity and belonging through establishing new possibilities of connection (Moore, 2011).

By affect, the thesis means an embodied state or form of cognition that is often indirect and non-reflective, but that nonetheless acts to mediate thought before becoming consciousness, and in relation to material and ecological spatial environments (Thrift, 2004). In other words, the manner in which rhythms, habits and daily movements of bodies act as unconscious filters to rational thinking, propelling subjects along paths that constitute subjectivity as feeling. Importantly, affect is not emotion or experience. These categories are important here as they help highlight failures of intimacy in keeping in touch, or the manner in which people avoid intimacy that can lead to alienation or even a contextual ‘tyranny’ of intimacy (Bialski, 2012). The kind of optimism that is being described here however, relates more to the repetitious search for proximity to clusters of promises for the good life (Berlant, 2011), whether experiences are good or bad. Thus, kinship and friendship are not fixed structures of the mind but felt possibilities that contribute to developing habits and rhythms of ICT and VFR practices.

Through this approach, we can begin to understand how ICT and VFR practices are fostered by past experiences, the present and by an image of the future, and how images of the future are re-scripted (Shove, 2007). In a sense, the thesis wishes to further develop Allan Williams notion of the ‘search space’ developed in relation to VFR, where visits become spaces
of negotiating different possibilities for the future (Hall & Williams, 2002). Instead of being confined to the spatial and temporal barriers of visits though, the thesis wishes to investigate the coproducive relationship between ICTs and VFR in daily life. Or how they are used to manage ethical desires, possibilities and anxieties that impact voluntary migrant mobility and family and friends immobility, as friends and family create plans, projects, and ideas for the future that then infiltrates everyday life.

In addition, considering insights from the last chapter on the development of ethical selves within particular life course moments, this approach has the strength of not reducing relationships to affect that might result in viewing personal communities as overly contingent. The focus here has the analytical advantage of understanding practices not simply through affect, through a binary of market and moral economies, or sets of practices. This approach instead teases out how aspects like care and consumption are potential and overlapping tools within moments of life projects (Smart, 2007) that aim for the collective development of modes of appropriate conduct between friends and family (Lury, 2011) and expressions and innovations of self-other relations.

4.6 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has sought to explore the implications for investigating socialites within personal communities of highly skilled migrants in relation to intimacy as belonging. The thesis began by attempting to track the rising trajectory of research on intimacy in relation to early work by Bauman (2003) and Giddens (1992). The thesis argues that the work of these scholars can be overly nostalgic and detached from the everyday lives of people. However, their work on increasing reflexivity and agency in consumer societies has preceded and in many ways paralleled a focus in academia on emotional worlds and practice theory that are linked to a focus on blurring spheres of the exotic and mundane. This work has helped shift the focus towards how belonging emerges in everyday life through aspects such as practice and emotional management, and that contributes to circulating articulations of the familiar and strange across migrant networks. Thus, this thesis finds significant analytical purchase from thinking about intimacy as belonging within socialities of migrant personal communities.

The chapter then considered the potential for looking at personal communities as ethical economies constructing emotional worlds through prosumption practices of physical and digital hosting and guesting. While this avenue is important, the thesis argues that focusing on
prosumption would ground the research in a binary form of analysis of tradition versus loss. Instead of over emphasizing the link between overarching capitalist power-knowledge structures to migrant personal relationships, more detailed focus should be paid to constructions from below, specifically to embodied and ethical forms of translocal belonging within personal communities.

Thus, the thesis argues for, in part, focusing on how within migrant personal communities togetherness is constructed through translocal rhythms of ICTs and VFR that articulates forms of intimacy as belonging. This form of belonging will be explored in relation to how migrants and friends and family seek to actualize ethical selves that spur desires and affective fantasies within particular contexts and intersections of the life course. Therefore, the thesis hopes to uncover the manner in which those dimensions lead to rhythms of VFR and ICT practices that form and maintain novel modes of intimacy as a translocal form of belonging.

The literature review chapters have helped to narrow the focus of the research. In order to discuss how this focus was researched, the following chapter will detail the methodology used to explore socialities of translocal personal communities.
5 Research Methodology- Investigating Ethical Imaginations of Togetherness

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to outline a methodological framework and research plan for investigating ethical imaginations of togetherness. At the heart of the research strategy is an interest in researching the banal cultural meanings and social relations of everyday life in relation to personal life and mobility. This methodology therefore, is heavily inspired by the Anthropological and Ethnological tradition of inquiry into everyday life. In this vein, this thesis articulates both ‘the social’ and ‘cultural’ through a lens of process that reflects larger debates about social relations and culture within Anthropology and Ethnology over the past decades. In addition, the methodology borrows a significant amount of methodological insight from the work of several authors: Henrietta Moore (2011) and her book *Still Life*, Madianou and Miller’s (2011) work on Polymedia with Filipino mothers and children in relation to migration and keeping touch with ICT’s, Baldassar's (1997, 2007b, 2008) writings on physical and digital VFR with Italians in Australia, Botterill’s (2013) work on Polish migrants in the UK and Poland, and Germann Molz’s (2012) book on travel, technology and togetherness.

I begin the chapter by setting out the research questions and objectives that guide the methodology. This section will be followed by a description of the epistemological and ontological position that underpins the research strategy. From there the chapter goes on to explain the approach this thesis takes to investigate ethical imaginations of togetherness through an understanding of the social and cultural as based on process, embedded within mobilities studies. The following section begins the work of detailing the overall research strategy of a multi-sited ethnography and the research techniques built into this strategy. The chapter then proceeds to the ethical implications for the research. Lastly, the chapter finishes by discussing some brief details of how the fieldwork developed, followed by some key thematic insights that guided the findings chapters.

5.2 Research Aim and Questions

Based on the three previous literature review chapters, this study has formulated a single research question and five objectives that will help answer that question.
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5.2.1 Research Question and Objectives

How are ethical imaginations of togetherness constituted from the manner in which migrants and friends and family utilize ICT and VFR practices for maintaining relationships?

Research Objectives

1. Understand the extent to which key relationships within personal communities participate in practices
   This objective aims to understand the various dimensions that lead to different relationships changing in different ways or perhaps disappearing completely. This includes differences between friendship and kinship but also within these categories. This objective will help explain how migration between London and Italy changes relationships by providing insight into the different aspects that lead different degrees of enacting practices of ICTs and VFR. This objective will also shed light on how relationships change as a result of migration.

2. Understand how participation in translocal socialities changes in different contexts of the life course.
   This objective aims to articulate how obligations/expectations to keep in touch between Italian migrants and their friends and family are constructed in similar or different ways at different moments in the life course. By investigating physical and digital VFR practices that occur between London and Italy at different moments during the life course, this thesis will be better able to offer a more nuanced understanding of the often sweeping analysis of social relations related to individualization.

3. Understand how different forms of commitment between friends and family are constructed in relation to ethical imaginations of self
   The objective aims to understand how people use different practices in different ways in order to constitute relationships. This objective will help shed light on the politics and power dynamics that shape relationships according to who stays in touch and the extent to which people want friends and family to impact their lives. This will enable a comparison between friendship and kinship and the degree to which they are negotiated in relation to the formation of ethical migrant selves. This objective will also help understand how physical and virtual travel between London and Italy is leveraged in relation to each other to achieve different ends in relationships.

4. Understand how the constitution of ethical selves through self-other relations is linked to fantasies of belonging
   This objective aims to understand the link between the manner in which migrants and friend and family constitute ethical selves through keeping in touch and how ethical selves are mediated by affective fantasies. This will help shed light on understanding migrant mobility both as an ethical enterprise within particular life course moments and as an affective register connected to distant contexts occurring at the micro subnational level.

5. Understand how rhythms of ICTs and VFR constitute forms of intimacy as belonging
This objective aims to understand the co-productive link between ICTs and VFR in constituting various levels of intimacy as belonging within translocal personal communities. This will help further conceptualize the level to which different relationships connect imaginations and feelings of self through rhythmic mobility. In addition, the objective helps to better understand how VFR virtual and physical travel mediates migrant mobility and friends and family (im)mobility.

5.3 Philosophy of Science, Relationships of (Im)Mobilities as Interpreted Realities

In order to answer the above research questions and research objectives this thesis needs to build an ontological and epistemological position that will guide the formulation of the research sample and methodological strategy. I will begin by examining the most dominant position within much of the natural and social sciences.

5.3.1 Positivism

This study could loosely be described as anti-positivist and thus derives much of its philosophical inspiration in opposition to positivism. Positivism is situated within the epistemological tradition of objectivism that believes objects in the world have meaning that exist independently from any subjective interpretation of them (King & Horrocks, 2010). The underlying belief of positivism is that an objective reality can be uncovered. Therefore, the aim for research within positivism is to provide objective knowledge that can be discovered through scientific inquiry (King & Horrocks, 2010). Also important to point out is that in positivism the researcher has an unbiased position in relation to the research, or that his/her subjectivity does not play a role in the creation of knowledge. Positivism maintains that if properly done, a researcher can generate knowledge of a research object that directly represents reality without his/her perceptions having an impact.

In addition, the positivistic contention that phenomena in the social and the natural world have objective and intrinsic properties that are separate from each other has had a large impact on the development of modernity, science and realism. The epistemological and ontological foundations of positivism have centered strongly in debates within academia around modernity and post-modernity. In regard to epistemology, the process of modernization has been linked to cultural differentiation, particularly embodied in the Kantian distinction between the theoretical, ethical and aesthetic realms, which became relatively autonomous and gave rise to epistemological realism (Davies, 2008). Realism underpins arguments that western civilization is founded on scientific and rational knowledge which values individual human life and freedom, and believes that such freedom and rationality lead to a linear forms of social progress through
self-controlled work and creating a better material, political and intellectual life (Cahoone, 1996). Thus, many scholars would argue that modernity emerged through a linear progression of real and rationalized knowledge that hinged upon the separation of scientists from the realms of politics, economy, and the social world - realms that have also been understood as separate from each other. More specifically within the social sciences, modernity and realism developed in parallel to structuralism and structural functionalism (Davies, 2008). In these theories, the social world is equivalent to the natural world, where abstract, static and universal structures, such as kinship or labor, exist independent of an individual actors’ knowledge of them and function in relation to each other.

Researching how togetherness is changing through positivism would entail conducting a quantitative approach that would view certain notions of friendship and kinship as entirely objective or essentialist. The aim of that style of research would be to produce objective knowledge that could, for example, examine the causal impact of gender and age on the success of relationships by measuring the frequency of contact according to certain ages and gender through a deductive statistical analysis. Positivism and related a methodology however, would be unable to capture the development of relational ethics and affective attachment that constitute ethical imaginations.

5.3.2 Moving Beyond Positivism, Attempts at a Middle Ground with Critical Realism

Critical realism is another potential approach often deployed within the social sciences that has attempted to move beyond positivism while incorporating other debates related to post-modern thought. Critical realism has grown from scholars studying post-modern thought who have hoped to find an approach that fits between positivism and interpretivism. These scholars have been concerned with post-modern thought’s ability to conduct social research (Davies, 2008): that is, if the world is only socially constructed social research loses the ability to explain the social world. Critical realists contend that the post-modern approach is exclusively an exercise in introspection where analysis circle endlessly into obfuscation.

Critical realism insists that not everything in the world is socially constructed. Knowledge of atoms and particles for example, are no doubt socially constructed but these phenomena exist nonetheless outside of our knowledge of them. In the same way, the social world also exists beyond the individuals’ knowledge of it. Critical realism maintains the
existence of social structures while accepting the more fluid generation of meaning in and between individual subjects. This is not an eternal and fixed understanding of structure as articulated by early structuralists like Radcliffe Brown. Quite generally, the belief in structure means that what happens in life can only happen within the context of what is already there; while what is there is never static and everlasting, it is what is there and what has to be dealt with in the act of doing (Cresswell, 2012). Critical realism argues for the existence of social structures while recognizing the multilayered and every changing nature of the social (Saunders et al., 2009) as brought about by human agency.

Therefore, the core principle of critical realism is that social reality is stratified, which can be seen in two distinct but inter-related levels of structure and agency (Davies, 2008):

human agents are neither passive products of social structures nor entirely their creators but are placed in an iterative and naturally reflexive relationship to them. Society exists independently of our conceptions of it, in its causal properties, its ability to exert deterministic force on individuals; yet it is dependent on our actions, human activity, for it’s reproduction and can be transformed by this activity. It is both real and transcendent (p.20).

This is an understanding of ontology where the individual and the social world are constituted both relationally and in separation. The qualities and capacities of given phenomena are a product of relations between things. However, some things have ‘firewalls’ that cut them off or make them more resistant to relationality than other things (Cresswell, 2012). We can neither understand behavioral observations as representative of a given social world nor fully reveal or reconstruct the social through researching actors meanings and beliefs (Davies, 2008).

The unstable yet transcendental capacity of meaning within critical realism denotes the necessity of delineating power relations or social conditions of possibility generated within particular historical contexts. Here, critical realism differs from interpretive philosophies in that interpretivists derive meaning only from situated data that takes informants at their word. Critical realism instead seeks explanation, in part, by viewing informant data as representational and in contrast to the political complexity of a given context (Tracy, 2013). In this way, critical realism borrows heavily from cultural Marxism, feminism and post-structuralism in attempting to grasp how representation works in and with the world. Or put another, critical realism starts
from the understanding that what shakes the stability and fixity of meaning is the manner in which power is established through representation that always works with practice and performance (Cresswell, 2012). In addition, this ontological understanding of society as changing and interconnected to agents, renders an epistemology that argues while knowledge of society exists beyond the individual, that can be known, knowledge of social structures can never be *entirely* known and will therefore always be incommensurable and incomplete. Thus, methodologies utilizing this approach would find it unfruitful to attempt to investigate the social world in any totalizing quantitative fashion.

In addition, because critical realism accepts the ontological interconnectedness of subjects, it also fully accepts that researchers reflexively construct their research objects. Critical realism requires ongoing reflexive awareness as part of research practice, without allowing such awareness to blind us to the existence of a reality beyond ourselves which provides the legitimate basis for the production and critique of theoretical abstractions (Davies, 2008).

### 5.3.3 The Politics of Paradigms, Post-structuralism and Post-modernity

This thesis is interested in how different perspectives and experiences of togetherness generate and attach meaning to relationships. Theories within the interpretivist paradigm are the most adapted to approaching these aims, particularly for the ability to grasp the subjective and intersubjective construction of relationships through representation and practice. Interpretivism has some common areas of agreement with critical realism, such as the need for reflexive awareness between the researcher and research object throughout the research process. A crucial difference though, is the importance of structure and agency in generating meaning. Critical realism has been particularly important in supporting theories related to arguments of social justice, like Marxism, that explore class, gender and ethnicity. This thesis recognizes the importance of such endeavors and indeed does not deny that structures generating culture as difference are at work in affluent migrant worlds of kinship and friendship. This thesis does, however, argue that to answer the above research question an epistemological and ontological stance that better orientates the thesis to how cultural meaning is fostered from forms of subjectification that are mediated by affect is required. Furthermore, we cannot hope to understand these processes if we see them as over determined by particular distributions of
power and resource and configurations of structure and agency (Moore, 2011). Thus, an interpretivist approach will better aid in understanding the above research question.

This approach began to gain steam in the latter half of the twentieth century when the notion of the linear progression of western civilization forged through scientific inquiry grounded in realism began to be criticized. Thomas Kuhn’s notion of ‘paradigm shifts’ acted as a key mobilizing force in this debate. Kuhn argued that the idea science discovers objective knowledge is both ahistorical and apolitical. He insisted instead on a relativist conceptualization of science, whose progress is not linear but conditional upon the inter-subjective politics of the scientific community that periodically give way to paradigm shifts in scientific regimes (Kuhn, 1962). In parallel, within philosophy and the social sciences in France, several emerging scholars began a sustained critique of structuralism and realism that then gave rise to post-structuralism. Similar to Kuhn, Michel Foucault sought to explain the means through which science constituted representational knowledge within certain historical contexts. In contrast to objectivism, Foucault argued that scientific institutions, largely within state apparatuses, exerted technologies of control that discursively shape the social conditions of possibility from which scientific knowledge is constructed and legitimized (Foucault et al., 2003).

Post-structuralism blazed many of the theoretical and philosophical trails that contributed to the arrival of postmodern thought. Both postmodern and poststructuralist theories are generally rooted in an interpretivist research philosophy. A full description of postmodernism and poststructuralism, however, is beyond the scope here. There are however, a few general and important points that help guide the discussion. Postmodernism, particularly methodological postmodernism, rejects the ultimate reliability of knowledge as valid in a realist sense, or that knowledge can represent the true and independent real nature of its objects (Cahoone, 1996). Postmodernists instead argue for pluralism of multiple realities, indeterminacy and a renunciation of intellectual hopes for simplicity, completeness and certainty. Contrary to the idea that the world is directly observable through the senses and experiences, Postmodernists turned the focus to representation, images, information and cultural signs as occupying a dominant position in social life, and an acceptance of play and fictionalization in the cultural fields that had earlier sought realist truth (Cahoone, 1996).
Much of qualitative research and a diverse range of theoretical camps within postmodernism are grounded in interpretivism. Phenomenology (although not exclusively postmodern), discourse analysis, non-representational theory, social constructionism and social constructivism are but a few. The epistemological positions of social constructionism are of particular interest for my purposes here. Social constructionism argues that there is no objective knowledge, instead there are multiple truths based on multiple realities and that the only knowledge that can be obtained from research are the perceptions generated from the researcher and informants.

Interpretivism has much strength and is generally more in line with the theoretical assumptions used to create the research questions and objectives in this study. Therefore, in order to understand the constitution of ethical imaginations of togetherness this thesis has built a methodology around an interpretivist epistemology and ontology.

5.4 A Qualitative Research Methodology within Mobilities Studies

In assuming an interpretivist ontology and epistemology the first step in the reflexive process is detailing the scientific paradigm and theoretical approach that informs the construction of knowledge in this research. At a general level this study has employed a qualitative reflexive ethnography whose aim is to build theory using an abductive approach, where theory follows from iterations of observations and data analysis (Saunders et al., 2009). As was mentioned above, the core of this study is to investigate ethical imaginations of togetherness constituted from mobilities of VFR and ICTs. There are two important implications here for methodology: first, by focusing on mobilities, I am signaling this study’s positioning within mobilities studies (not necessarily within a mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006) ); and second, while this research is primarily interdisciplinary, in drawing on Anthropologist Henrietta Moore’s (2011) notion of ethical imagination, it is important to point out that this study’s framework draws heavily from a poststructuralist anthropological/ethnological cultural and social lens.

The thesis will begin by outlining some implications for working with mobilities studies. Within the social sciences a new paradigm centered on mobilities has emerged (Sheller & Urry, 2006). For many years, studies from multiple disciplines have begun to point towards mobility as a key dimension in an increasingly globalized world. Mobility was said to be at the center of new (and old) flows of money, technology, electronic media, people and ideas (Appadurai, 1996),
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generating new spaces of flows linked to the rise of societies based on electronically networked social relations (Castells, 1996). These flows are all tied to a series of transformations from the intertwining of macro cultural and economic systems (Lash & Urry, 1994) to the restructuring of leisure practice through tourism (Löfgren, 1999).

These conceptualizations indicated a need to more explicitly articulate the role both physical and virtual forms of mobility play in the modern world. Instead of viewing phenomena as diverse as tourism, dancing or walking as disconnected and requiring study from diverse and sovereign disciplines, movement itself needs to be taken as a salient, unifying and multi-dimensional object worthy of exclusive focus. Mobilities research has developed to approach this need. Key to mobilities research is analyzing the productive relationship between mobilities, immobilities and moorings (Hannam et al., 2006). Moorings has mostly been understood as an organizing concept for spatial mobility systems - whether physical or virtual – where mobilities cannot be understood without taking into consideration their infrastructural underpinnings and the various ways in which they are physically stabilized and fixed in place (Germann Molz, 2012). The dynamic relationship between mobilities and immobilites refers to the meaningful and embodied, coproduction of movement and stillness (Cresswell, 2006), where mobility and immobility are produced relationally at different scales, across time and space. This is an important point for this research, as it highlights how relationships and collective sets of relationships are composed of and constituted from the relational production of mobilities and immobilites across the life course.

5.4.1 The ‘Cultural’ and ‘Social’ as Process

While this study is explicitly interdisciplinary in nature, an Anthropological/Ethnological cultural and social lens also heavily informs the research. Both the ‘the social’ and ‘cultural’, and the relationship between the two, is at the center of this research and requires some description. In brief, both the cultural and the social are understood as process. The emphasis on process stems from a turn within Anthropology to overcome conceptualizations of culture as fixed and contained within place, that dominated the discipline for most of the twentieth century. In regard to culture, there has been a marked shift away from closed systems of meaning to a definition where culture is:
the process through which competing and often conflicting understandings and interpretations of the world around us are generated, structured, signified, and ultimately shared and contested. Culture in this sense is not a static or bounded entity, neither is it anything which a person or group ‘has’. It is ever-shifting. As some have pointed out (..) it can be likened to a river. When viewed from a distance, it may seem to be something which is permanently etched into the landscape, but as you approach the river it becomes apparent that it is ever flowing, swirling, and changing (O'Dell, 2010, p. 14)

The social, in this study, is understood in equally unbounded and contingent terms. The framing of which is embodied in the focus on togetherness as sociality. Sociality has gained traction within the social sciences in recent years for an ability to shift conceptualizing ‘the social’ through a lens of ‘society’, formal patterns of ‘social relations,’ or as some kind of product of ‘social interactions,’ to an emphasis on process (Long & Moore, 2013a). Sociality affords a more diametric framing of ‘the social’ that encompasses plasticity, fragility but also resilience. We can define sociality as “a dynamic and interactive relational matrix through which human beings come to know the world they live in and to find their purpose and meaning within it (Long & Moore, 2013a, p. 14)”. Within this research sociality is articulated through mobilities research that, as was described in chapter one, is a mobile and translocal social matrix emerging across the migration process.

5.4.2 Process as Discursive and Embodied Meaning Making

In addition, this research employs an understanding of social and cultural process that seeks to investigate how meaning is generated through the entwinement of representational and experiential or non-representational practice. In regard to mobility, human geographer Tim Cresswell has outlined a theory of mobility that helps shed light on understanding meaning making. While this thesis disagrees with his stipulation that a dimension of mobility is factual, there is important insight to be found in his argument that mobility is the dynamic equivalent of place, whose meaning is produced through intersections of how mobility is represented, and how mobility is practiced, experienced and embodied (Cresswell, 2006). People are always moving through discursive space as physical bodies, experiencing the world through emotions/affects that informs the construction of the subjects they represent (ibid). In one way, representation here relates to what Foucault termed the power knowledge nexus, or in the *History of Sexuality*
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Volume One the intertwining of power-knowledge-pleasure (Foucault, 1990). Foucault argues the family came to be defined as a unit of control linked to the multiplication, display and saturation of discourse on sexuality that organizes the family and the relationship between the family and institutions of public governance (Duschinsky & Rocha, 2012). While important, in this research, the aim is not to explore the link between representation and power regimes like the state, the EU or perhaps tech companies but instead to explore care for the self as representations of the self to self and others that form interpersonal ethics. According to Foucault (1994) care for the self involves representations to self, that expresses the freedom of the self, by utilizing particular technologies of the self which he defines as:

Technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality (p.225).

Foucault’s tracing of technologies of the self through history, though, have mostly depicted them as forms of practice such as writing and journaling. These practices offered the possibility to define the self as an object that could then be used to transform the self through the monitoring of practice, attitudes and conduct with others. Thus, his critique perhaps does not adequately theorize the role of the body, affect and emotion in technologies of the self (Moore, 2011). We need to attend to affect (defined in the previous chapter) and how the senses such as sight, affects, desires, that takes up selves, others, and places and transforms them, redeploy them and connects them through metonymic relationships (Coleman & Crang, 2002). This helps to shift attention from symbolic meanings and discourses to forms of acting and doing that enhance creative potentials as well as the significance of technologies and the material affordances of places (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010). Thus, while informants may be influenced by norms or proposed obligations to parents for instance, what is crucial to understand is the way in which informants are able to reflect on themselves as sons, daughters, migrants or tourists and their particular parents, within their particular life course context that reimagines particular rules of conduct and principles relating to VFR and ICTs. Furthermore, it is important to grasp how those principles are generated and performed through the actual sensual and affective experience of practices of keeping in touch that then can lead to altered and modified forms self-monitoring.
To grasp the ethics and embodied practice of togetherness this study will draw from a conceptual toolbox of various academic disciplines from the humanities and social sciences. In addition, this thesis argues cognitive desires and affects like hope cannot be rigidly separated and defined, they overlap as shifting constellations in human life, forming a dynamic matrix that animates the ethical imagination (Moore, 2011). It is for this reason that the thesis does not attempt definitions of desire and hope.

5.5 Constructing the Field and Locating Informants: London to Italy as a Professional Migration Route

5.5.1 Research Participants and Sample Description

Knowledge about migrants will be produced depending on how the field is constructed, the choice of theoretical perspectives that inform this research and the choice of respondents (Povrzanovic Frykman & Humbracht, 2013). I will begin by detailing the research participants. The research participants in this study are centered on young Italian working professionals or highly skilled migrants living in London. The choice of Italians does not reflect an exclusive focus on investigating Italian ethnicity. To the contrary, this study recognizes the importance of research that has suggested the ‘ethnic lens,’ that is so pervasive in migration studies, can distort studies of migration and its intertwinement with globalization (Glick Schiller et al., 2006). This is not to say that ethnicity is not important. Ethnicity is no doubt significant, we do however, require theories of globalization that view the social and cultural not only as difference (Moore, 2011). In addition, the thesis also recognizes the vital importance of conducting research, or especially comparative research, of different groups from the Global North and South and unskilled labor. Such a focus though, is beyond the scope of this research.

The choice of Italians was motivated by several factors. First, ease with recruitment. The ability to utilize my network in recruiting better facilitated finding and securing informants for the research. My network includes people in London and in Italy, that acted as a means for locating potential informants. Second, as clear communication is essential to building trust between researcher and informant in ethnography (Cricco-Lizza, 2007) there is a need for a common language. Migrant informants acted as gatekeepers to additional informants along their networks that led to interviews with informants that do not speak English. Considering the importance of trust, stimulating narratives on relationships and capturing the changing dynamics
between different relationships, interviews required a common language between informants and researcher. As I speak English and Italian, all informants needed to be able to speak one of those languages. Third, there was potential for high travel costs related to conducting the fieldwork. A sample that included a wide variety of geographically dispersed nationalities across Europe increased the potential for conducting fieldwork across several countries that in turn would incur a significant amount of travel cost. Thus, Italians were also chosen to help control travel costs.

Lastly, Italian migrants were also chosen as a poignant case for exploring the inter-subjective and relational ethics of relationships as opposed to moral dimensions. Much of literature on Italian migration and transnationalism has emphasized kinship, not a range of personal relationships and moral dimensions of social relations (Baldassar, 1997, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2016; Baldassar & Gabaccia, 2011; Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Reynolds & Zontini, 2013; Wessendorf, 2011; Zontini, 2014). In this vein, migrant informants were recruited in part according to their socio-economic position and relative youth. As was described in chapter one, this study in part aims to problematize narratives of ‘individualization’ often aimed at affluent migrants. This study, then, builds on Baldassar's (2007b, 2008) insight in studying Italian migrants in Perth that those migrants who seek to further a professional career through migration experienced greater difficulties and pressure from family members related to their mobility as opposed to migrants who came in the post-war period (and who were of a lower-income group). Perceptions of choice related to mobility for career advancement, potentially increases expectation to stay in touch or at least may add a more problematic layer of politics to family and friendship. In addition, the availability of disposable income combined also with the freedom of movement within the EU affords further potential for physical as well as digital co-presence. The professions that were recruited included two surgeons, a business manager, a health administration professional, an accountant, a natural scientist, an events manager, a social and economic researcher and a manager in a patent office. Thus, considering the potential for keeping in touch, and lack of state intervention as demonstrated in other studies (Wessendorf, 2011), these participants are a salient group for understanding the kinds ethics of attachment and belonging that take shape post-migration moments.

In addition, it is important to point out that there are significant differences between and within these professions. Differences such as socioeconomic standing, motivations for mobility
and routes followed that enable mobility, all have important implications for structuring this particular form of migration and how the migration cycle is affected (Williams & Balaz, 2005). In addition, migrants in the sample all come from different parts of Italy (five from northern Italy, one from a western region, one from central Italy and one from a southern region). There are significant regional differences in Italy with rich and complex migration histories (Sassen, 1999) that potentially play a role in generating different perceptions of migration and relationships. The ability to differentiate between professions and regions, however, would have significantly complicated recruiting. Therefore, an inability to choose between professions and regions constitutes a limitation of the research. This research operates however, under a recognition of the general rise of skilled professional migration among the middle class (Scott, 2006). Thus, while there are differences within the sample this problem is tempered to a certain extent by a general socioeconomic outlook related to restructuring labor and class formation.

In addition to a socio-economic position, this study aims to investigate how meaning is made through the intersection of the life course and the migration process. At a general level, the thesis moves away from previous views of the migration process that see’s migrants as transnationally active yet settled (Levitt, 2001) and more towards more recent calls for an emphasis on the migration process as ambiguous, fluid and on-going (Findlay et al., 2015). More specifically for our purposes here, the thesis draws from Botterill's (2013) argument that the migration process is articulated through three ruptures in individualization, moving out from family, keeping in touch with family and coming back to family (even though not all migrants pass through all three stages); and how these ruptures relate simultaneously to opportunities for individual autonomy and familial dynamics. The focus in this research is on the extent to which different relationships keep in touch. Therefore, while not interested in viewing the migration processes from beginning to end, in this study, the life course and migration process are viewed as intimately synced as with Botterill’s research. There are two cohorts based on time abroad, with each cohort being divided between key criteria. The approach of two cohorts of migrants aims to create an ability to compare the development of different migrant personal communities at different intersections of the migration process and life course.

The cohorts in this research are not based on historically linked moments but according to time abroad. The cohorts are: 1) one to two years, and 2) four to nine years abroad. The aim here
is to enable a comparison between cohorts in how different relationships, and the dynamics between relationships, have changed over time, and to investigate the processes through which these relationships have been attached different meanings. The different periods between cohorts is aimed at allowing enough time for ethical economies of staying in touch to develop, permitting enough variation between them and to avoid allowing enough time to have passed to risk eliminating the possibility that friendships no longer exist. Thus, each cohort is designed to act as a temporal marker to understand how relationships and relationship dynamics develop over time. In addition, while the research is not based on historically linked moments, Italy has experienced continued recession since the financial crisis in 2008 (and before) and heighten concern for brain drain in popular discourse (Tintori & Romei, 2016) and this was taken into consideration during analysis. Also, while a longitudinal study of changes in relationships would be the most appropriate strategy for the research aims, the time constraints of the study deny that possibility.

Initially, the study aimed to recruit six migrant informants and divide them into two cohorts (See Figure One). As with previous work (Baldassar, 2007b; Botterill, 2013; Madianou & Miller, 2011), migrant informants acted as gatekeepers; they were requested to assist in contacting friends and family abroad that were interviewed at a later time. Migrants were requested to help recruit six to seven informants per migrant personal community, with a minimum threshold of three informants. Including an amount of relationships above seven would have exceeded the scope of the study. Important to point out, also, is that investigating changing dynamics with important relationships drove the recruitment of friends and family and indeed the study itself. The number of people per network was designed to enable the possibility for a variety of different kinds of important relationships and dynamics within different kinds of relationships (but according to informant descriptions and choice). Thus, the minimum number of three informants per personal community was set in order enable greater analysis of interpersonal relationships. It should be stressed, however, that this framework was intended to offer broad guidance. In addition, questions were asked about friends in the UK but friends were not interviewed in order to help limit number of informants. Friends also included those who have moved out of Italy.

Migrant friends and family were chosen according to three intersecting criteria that were
examined during the initial interviews with migrants in London. First, following previous work (Cronin, 2014; Pahl & Pevalin, 2005), informants were asked to map relationships in concentric circles, with themselves at the center, according to how close each person is perceived to be. Second, informants were asked to describe which of these informants maintain contact through digital and physical VFR, and to what degree. Third, informants were asked about the qualities and histories of relationships and in some cases dynamics between different people within their personal community. The aim of these three criteria was to gain an understanding of the importance of relationships and how they might have changed in relation to practices of keeping in touch.

Analyzing time abroad in isolation, as described above, is not effective to qualify the intersection of relationships and the life course. Therefore, each cohort was divided between one informant who is married/with a partner and has children, one without children but with a spouse/partner and one who is single. There are indications from the literature that having children, or having the desire for children, can motivate return migration (Botterill, 2013) or act as impetus for further and continuing physical and digital VFR (Humbracht, 2015). By creating the possibility for comparison between different life moments, the research was able to analyze how the life course and development of relationships after initial migration moments informs the reconstruction and resistance of expectations to keep in touch. In addition, the divisions between cohorts also enabled a comparison between relationships, to investigate which relationships at which moments of the life course become more salient and the role mobility or immobility plays in reconstructing different relationships. Moreover, for those migrants who are married or with a partner, interviews were also conducted with spouses/partners to investigate how digital and physical VFR impacts the relationship dynamics of spouses. While there are no criteria for types of couples, practices of keeping in touch are likely to be influenced by spouses and practices are also likely to influence spouses. Comparisons between those who are married/with a partner and those who are not affords an understanding of how changing dynamics of relationships of friends and family impact romantic relationship dynamics and visa versa, as well as how the absence of spousal relationships impact expectations to visit or not.

In addition, there is a growing body of literature acknowledging the role gender plays in (Baldassar, 2008; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Parrenas, 2005; Uteng & Cresswell, 2008) shaping
transnational space, including the gendering of keeping in touch. The original methodology aimed to interrogate the potential that women are largely charged with keeping in touch across relationship categories of kinships and friendship, and if the inclusion of virtual and physical practices has any impact on the gendering of relationships. This research, however, did not create criteria for gender, as this may have over complicated the recruitment process. Gender was found to play a role in relationships, however, this dimension did not emerge in a significant enough manner to merit focus within the findings chapters.

**Figure One**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Description - Italian Working Professionals</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Categories</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sample configuration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Italian, German/English, French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age/Life course</td>
<td>Each cohort has at least one informant with children, one married/partner but without children, and one who is unmarried.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Abroad/Migration experience</td>
<td>Two different cohorts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic position</td>
<td>University educated working</td>
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In constructing knowledge of migrant mobility, the borders of the research field are constructed in parallel to research participants. The physical location of the field is London and Italy. In addition, one interview was conducted in Paris and a digital interview conducted with an informant living in Germany. In this study, Italy was designed to carry equal weight with London. Positioning London together with Italy, and indeed the persistence of relationships across national boundaries is underpinned by a series of theoretical assumptions around the
relationship between place and the constitution of subjectivity in modernity. Traditionally in anthropology the field has been understood as a static and bounded site, separated in space and time from research institutions that researchers entered into and left (Davies, 2006). This is reflected in migration research that analyzed migration in terms of push and pull factors (Zimmerman, 1994), or arguing that after migration moments, migrants are no longer involved in their home countries, and that migration is not really a form of mobility as after moving migrants are mostly no longer mobile (Hage, 2005). These conceptualizations promote an essentialist understanding of migrant selves as unified, fixed and isomorphic, whose embeddedness is shaped through economic, political and social forces situated within bounded sites. This formulation of place and self, preclude analysis of contingent worlds and constructing a field that crosses national borders.

This study, however, aligns with scholars within migration, tourism and mobility studies that argue for research fields that travel beyond the nation state (Hall & Williams, 2002; Löfgren, 1999; Urry, 2000; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). Within migration, this argument is underscored by a theoretical orientation that has developed since the early nineties that stipulates the transnational character of migration, forged from connections that link migrants and places across nations (Glick Schiller, 1995). In this research, migrants, as individual actors, cannot be viewed in isolation from the translocal social fields in which they are embedded, in that the translocal practices migrants and non-migrants engage in are a function of the kinds of organized social groups within which they are carried out (Levitt, 2001). These authors arguments have developed in parallel to studies of globalization that argue increased deterritorialization and reterritorialization of people, media, money, objects and technology (Appadurai, 1996) have marked a need to rethink the local not as contained but as porous and linked to distant locations through often historically constituted routes (Appadurai, 1996; Clifford, 1997). Migrants and friends and family maintain contact across national borders that simultaneously situate and distribute subjectivity in and between localities. Thus, the scripts of migrant’s everyday lives are produced, juxtaposed and interrogated along global networks that shape migrant and non-migrant ontologies relationally (Botterill, 2013)

The translocal field was chosen for several important reasons. London was chosen, in part, because the physical proximity of the city assisted with recruitment and the ability to
conduct interviews with Italian migrants. In addition, the UK and Italy migration route is a well established route with a rich history (Colpi, 1991; King, 1977). In fact, the UK is the number one destination for Italian migration (Tintori & Romei, 2016) with London being a top choice for locating (Sabater, 2015). Furthermore, London and Italy (and the choice of Italians) was chosen in combination with the criteria of socioeconomic category of working professionals looking to pursue a career lifestyle or other personal ambitions. London’s economic dynamism and position within Europe as a center for employment opportunity makes London an ideal site for recruiting informants. In addition, the EU serves as a crucial backdrop to the research field for its potential to investigate the link between the construction of expectation in relation to both physical and virtual travel. In contrast to Baldassar and Miller’s studies that were conducted over great distances (UK to the Philippines and Australia to Italy), that made regular VFR visits difficult for their informants, the combination of Europe as research field and the socio-economic position of informants helped to provide insight into how and why informants leverage physical and digital visits together.

An important point here is that new technologies can potentially spur the further construction of obligation to keep in touch (Baldassar, 2008). I argue this applies to both physical and virtual travel. Thus, a crucial element of the research field is recognition of the EU as a supranational organization grafted onto national governments that aims to foster European social, political, and economic integration. A key technique in engineering integration is the Schengen treaty (even though the UK is not a member). This agreement aims to generate new economic and social synergies by legally opening national borders for European citizens, and encouraging the ‘freedom’ of mobility. In addition, in parallel to receding borders, Europe has also seen the rise of low cost air travel (Williams & Balaz, 2009). Together, the political and social technologies of the EU, in combination with air travel, open new horizons for developing ethics of personal life for physical VFR.

Italy to London as a route of migration and VFR mobility embedded in a wider EU context should not only be understood though as a virtual and physical space of overlapping political, economic and social forces interacting at micro and macro levels. Transnational space is equally imagined (Appadurai, 1996; Elliott & Urry, 2010) and affective (Thrift, 2008). Thus, some barriers to VFR and keeping touch may in some ways have been lifted by EU policy on
freedom of mobility and the increase in low cost airfare. The trajectory of different forms of physical and virtual (im)mobilities related to keeping touch however, depend on how different imagined and affective geographies are mobilized and rerouted along with different interwoven circuits of political and economic forces.

5.6 Research Strategy: a Multi-Sited Ethnography of Togetherness

A research study that aims to investigate the qualitative dynamics of translocal relationships requires a multi-sited and translocal ethnography. The research field, as described above, was mostly in London and Italy. Therefore, critical to this study is an ability to capture perceptions of relationships as they develop intersubjectively across transnational space, and that inflect migrant and non-migrant embeddedness within different global sites. Multi-sited ethnography follows people, connections, associations, and relationships across space (because they are substantially continuous but spatially non-contiguous). Research design proceeds by a series of juxtapositions in which the global is collapsed into and made an integral part of parallel, related local situations, rather than something monolithic or external to them (Falzon, 2009).

This study argues for a need to employ a multi-sited ethnography that is mostly physical. It could be argued that migrants might be interviewed in London, and their friends and family in Italy interviewed via Skype or by phone. This is problematic for several reasons. First, as one of the aims of the study is to understand different degrees of mobilization, a physical multi-sited ethnography is needed in order to enable the possibility to interview the multifaceted experiences of modernity. It is especially important, for example, to understand those whose notion of friendship and family does not include keeping in touch extensively by either traveling abroad or through digital means. Second, despite the significant global implications of migration, much work in migration studies has been inhibited by the inability to conduct research transnationally. Thus, the multi-sited ethnography assists in overcoming methodological nationalism (Madianou & Miller, 2011). And most importantly, face to face encounters continue to be important despite the increasing respatialization of lived worlds (Larsen et al., 2008). Both Baldassar, and Madianou and Miller reported the absolute necessity in conducting a mulit-sited ethnography when trying to investigate transnational families. Madianou and Miller (2011) argued this point
saying that transnationalism is about relationships, and the only way to grasp how contact engenders ruptures, conflict and the intimate relational dynamics of relationships is through a transnational ethnography that includes physical presence.

5.6.1 Participant Observation

The first element of a multi-sited ethnography to be discussed is participant observation. While multi-sited ethnography and participant observation are divided by heading and subheading, in reality the line separating them is extremely thin. Participant observation is the principle and overarching method used in ethnography to organize and articulate other research techniques including recruitment strategy. This is due to the fact that participant observation is the means through which relationships between researcher and informants, and the social identities of both that will configure the research, is understood. Thus, the aim of this subsection is to define the use of participant observation for this study.

Participant observation is about more than just observing informants or immersion into the research context. In reality, participation is almost certainly not the major data gathering technique. Instead, participation in the everyday lives of people facilitates observation of behaviors, events and enables more open and meaningful discussions with informants (Davies, 2008). Or more simply, participant observation affords the creation of relationships with informants that permit the collection of rich and multifaceted data. The process of working with informants thus is one of a mutual search for understanding that bridges between the social worlds of informant and ethnographer (ibid). Important here is to disentangle participant observation from positivistic underpinnings that are rigid in design and aimed at homogenous or even application of research techniques. Instead, participant observation draws from fluid and reflexive relationships where researchers and informants’ social identities continuously reconfigure roles that generate research data. Furthermore, the multiple methods that organize the research flow from these relationships. A multi-method approach consists of combining multiple data collection techniques (Saunders et al., 2009). Ethnographic fieldwork is both thoroughly designed and unstructured, and includes data gathered from a range of sources (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003) that flow from field relations, thus allowing for the juxtaposition of different forms of data.

The key to quality is the way in which ethnographers ground observations in critical
reflection on the nature of their participation, its suitability to the particular research circumstances and the relationship between researcher and subjects (Davies, 2008). In regard to the relationship between researcher and informants, the greatest threat to the reliability of participant observation is observer bias (Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, a key capacity is the ability to reflexively interpret how data results from the intersection of the social identities and changing roles of all parties throughout the research process.

The research object of this study is intimately linked to my own personal experience. I am married to an Italian working professional migrant who has lived abroad for three and half years, and who (and I) regularly keeps in touch with friends and family in Italy through physical and digital VFR. In many practical ways, this makes me a complete participant (Gold, 1958): or someone who studies contexts in which they are already members or to which they become fully affiliated (Tracy, 2013). I am a complete participant because the research object is a part of my daily life. In addition, several informants are a part of my local network. I am also, however, a participant as an observer (Gold, 1958), or someone whose identity as a researcher is revealed but who hopes to acquire the trust of informants in order to enable the collection of more in-depth data (Saunders et al., 2009). I am a participant as observer for those participants who I met for the first time, as I occupy a position outside their social network.

The advantage of a complete participant is access to a depth and breadth of the culture’s deep background that gives a unique standpoint from which to make connections between a span of issues that might otherwise go unnoticed (Tracy, 2013). My familiarity with many of the experiences and research informants I am researching allowed for a greater depth, both in cultural background and the specific aspects of inquiry. A drawback of this advantage, however, is that I am so enmeshed in the research context that it can create difficulties in noticing unique values (Agar, 1994). An important requirement of ethnography is to suspend a wide range of common-sense knowledge in order to minimize the danger of being misled by preconceptions about the setting and the people in it (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003). To overcome this, maintaining reflexivity to the field was essential. I took rigorous field notes and continuously reviewed theoretical material to help achieve this. As was mentioned above, reflexivity and awareness of how roles and field relations are changing is a critical aspect of ethnography. In this study, I was forced to manage my subjective distance to the field in order to ensure I was not too
close as to miss important insights.

5.6.2 Recruitment

A part of participant observation is recruitment. The primary recruitment strategy was to recruit from my existing network. Potential informants were contacted from within my more immediate and local social network in London and several others were contacted through a more extended network. To recruit others, the second aspect of the recruitment strategy was snowball sampling where existing informants provided information about other potential informants (Saunders et al., 2009). Yet another means of recruitment was through my nonlocal, Italian social network. London is a common destination for young working professionals in Milan, where a majority of my network in Italy is based. Several people within that network have friends or relatives who have migrated to London for work. Two informants in London were recruited via my network in Milan while the rest were contacted via my network in London. Thus, a trans-local recruitment strategy proved to be effective. Lastly, informants were not offered compensation for their participation in the fieldwork.

The fieldwork began with migrant interviews in July 2015 and concluded with follow-up migrant interviews in April 2016 (see appendix nine for further details). Recruiting informants was relatively uncomplicated. One difficulty emerged when two informants who were happy to provide interviews subsequently did not agree to introduce me to friends and family in Italy. I was, however, able to find two other informants. The only other major difficulty occurred when one informant offered to provide other informants but was unclear on how many. Once already in Italy, and late in the fieldwork, the informant provided contact with only two people which was below the threshold set in the methodology. Thus, there was a last-minute recruiting effort to find a replacement informant of the same life course and migration status. Finding a new informant proved easier than anticipated though, and I was able to plan interviews with people from the new informant’s personal community on a trip that had already been planned.

5.6.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

In order to capture how relationships change and the meanings informants attribute to changing relationships through discourse, semi-structured interviews were used. In contrast to structured and unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews afford the possibility to ask questions related to predetermined themes while also being open ended enough to allow
informants to explain experiences in their own words and not be overly restricted to the preconceived notions of the ethnographer (Davies, 2008).

The aim of interviews was to incite, without driving, informant narratives in regard to relationships and practices. The assumption driving interviews is that lived experiences of relationships are impossible to quantify but are instead incessant and confusing (King & Horrocks, 2010). Because of the ambiguity of lived experience the task of ethnographers is to encourage what becomes the artful structuring of experiences through narratives that make meaningful connections come into view (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Fieldwork began in July 2015 with an initial round of interviews with migrant informants, lasting from one to two hours and was conducted in neutral locations in London. These interviews had three overlapping aims. First, for interviews with those informants who I did not previously know, the interviews were used to build a rapport that helped to access informant networks and facilitate the demands of fieldwork. Second, interviews were used to obtain narrative histories of relationships that informants identified as important from before migration moments up until the present. This approach builds on but is set apart from the work of Baldassar (2008) whose work focused on the semi-life histories of three different cohorts of Italian migrants that was mostly between migrant children and parents in Italy. Interviews in this study focused on narrative histories of relationships of friends and family. In addition, and in contrast to Baldassar, interviews centered on relationships where contact is regularly maintained and semi-regularly maintained. The point was to first identify key relationships regardless of the extent to which they keep in touch.

The initial interviews began with informants being asked to map friends and family in concentric circles, with themselves occupying the central position, according to perceptions of closeness (see figures five and six, maps have been altered for anonymity). This technique was employed by Spencer and Pahl (2006) in relation to personal communities and by Cronin (2014) in relation to friends at a distance. In addition, the thesis followed Cronin in that my aim is not to map the form or reach of respondents networks as in Social Network Analysis but to explore the qualitative detail (Cronin, 2014) of how mobility and immobility is experienced in and between relationships. In addition to perceptions of closeness based on maps, informants were also asked to describe who maintains contact through digital and physical VFR, to what degree, the general
development and trajectory of these relationships and the changes between relationships. These discussions were used to build discussion about practices of keeping touch.

It should be noted though, that after attempting several pilot tests of the concentric circles mapping technique I decided against including rigid rules on the circles. I found that informants could become anxious about having to list relationships and that by allowing them the freedom to design maps for themselves, while paying attention to distance, they found the processes easier and more enjoyable. This did introduce a risk in that maps could have been of too low a quality to be useful. However, as the maps are intended to provoke discussion of qualities and histories of relationship, the risk for low quality maps was outweighed by the benefit of informants feeling more comfortable so that it offered a higher probability for greater discussion.

While interviews in London were conducted on a one to one basis, I aimed to conduct interviews with friends and family in Italy in small groups of two, perhaps three, depending on how relationships are characterized by migrants in initial interviews. The aim of this approach was to simulate the dynamics of relationships where informants were asked about their relationship to the migrant informant, practices (or non-practices), how informants have to come to situate and articulate practices together in their daily lives and how this has informed the personal and collective meanings of relationships. Based on this discussion informants were also asked about plans for the future and how relationships informed the construction of future plans in order to understand how practices have shaped and altered future trajectories (see figure three).

The second rounds of interviews with migrants in London were guided largely by what was learned from interviews with friends and family in Italy. By understanding different difficulties, pleasures, hopes, and fears of friends and family in Italy I was able to understand the extent to which they are constructed with those of migrants in London. Therefore, the second interviews re-examined some aspects of practices that were interrogated in the initial interviews in order to gain a more fluent picture of (non)practices. Questions, however, were also more focused on the migration experience, how relationships mediate the migration experience and what plans migrants have for the future, both in terms of migration and how they plan to approach keeping in touch in the future. The aim here was to investigate how relationships and
practices entangled in digital and physical VFR have shaped new trajectories and images of the future.

**Figure Five**

![Figure Five Diagram](image)

**Figure Six**

![Figure Six Diagram](image)
After completing interviews in London the fieldwork involved three trips to Italy and one trip to France. Interviews in London revealed that I had previously failed to consider that friends and family might also be domestic/international migrants, thus potentially creating complicated logistics for the fieldwork and expensive travel arrangements. Several informants had loved ones spread throughout Italy and the world. These difficulties were managed in that, with the exception of two informants, their locations coincided with the locations of other informants, which allowed me to group interviews together from different personal communities into multiple trips. One trip involved traveling to three locations in northern Italy. A second trip
occurred in one location in central Italy and one location in southern Italy. A third trip took place in two locations in a remote part of western Italy.

Three important informants (non-London informants) do not live in Italy. One informant lives in France. Considering there was available research funding for the trip, I decided also to travel to France for an interview. Another key informant lives in Germany. Due to difficulties with scheduling I was unable to reach this informant in person. I opted instead to interview her via Skype as an alternative. Despite conducting the interview online instead of in person the interview went well as the informant was keen to discuss her relationship with the informant in London. There was one further informant who lives in Chile. I was unable to reach this informant due to the excessive cost necessary for physical travel and because of scheduling conflicts when attempting to arrange a Skype interview. In London interviews were conducted in either English or Italian. In Italy all interviews were conducted in Italian. Interviews were then transcribed into the language in which the interview was conducted.

5.7 Ethics and Reflexivity

Linked to the quality of research that was described above are the ethical dimensions of this research. To produce quality research entails delineating the ethical implications of the research and how ethical integrity will be maintained (Tracy, 2013). This includes outlining the reflexivity of fieldwork or how I as a researcher and social actor could have potentially impacted the lives of informants.

In order to build an ethical argument for this study, I will draw from a relational ethical approach. This approach requires researchers to be reflexive to one’s own role and impact on relationships, as well as recognizing participants are whole people rather than subjects from which to wrench data (Tracy, 2013). This approach entails an analysis of the situational ethics of research, in my case friends and family, and a general guideline that research should do no harm to informants or the wider community (Tracy, 2013). In addition, the ethical stance here is informed, to a certain extent, by social and communitarian ethics that assumes research should always attempt to serve communities and not the status quo, such as men and gendered knowledge (in feminism) or policy makers (King & Horrocks, 2010).

To begin to address reflexivity and the situational ethics of the research, I first need to point out that I completed the mandatory university ethics check list and found that the study was
not in need of ethical approval from the ethics board. Second, I will need to address my relationship to the research object and how the research objectives could have impacted informants. Researchers need to ethically consider research questions, how they impact the interested parties and what the implications and applications of research might be if framed in this way (King & Horrocks, 2010). Critical to understand is how I, as a moral mobile agent, could have potentially influenced the relationships of friends and family in relation to research on togetherness. In contemporary social thought, words associated with mobility are unremittingly positive while words that denote immobility generally have negative underpinnings (Cresswell, 2006). As a migrant who has lived abroad for several years and who lives in the same city as Italian working professional informants, I could have potentially reinforced their mobility across their social network. There were friends and family who view informant migration in negative terms that played a role in inflecting the immobility of friends and family in Italy. Awareness of these issues was particularly important considering the political dimensions of relationships. I have experienced these issues myself with friends and family in the US and in Italy with my wife’s family. This politics has become an important feature of our daily lives and quite naturally I have developed opinions and ethical positions relative to our choices and experiences with our own mobility. Thus, it was essential throughout the fieldwork and analysis that I sought to reduce any impact on the social relations of informants in relation to any family or friends mobility politics by maintaining a neutral position, and attempting to build an empathetic rapport with all informants, not only migrants.

In addition, considering a key aim of the research involves the life course, I also had to pay particular attention to my own life course status. I am married, and at the time of the fieldwork I had one child. On one side my family status played a role in helping to meet and get to know informants in Italy in that many were curious about my family and asked many questions about my wife and child, something that reflected the normative status of family in conducting the fieldwork. I did, however, seek to pay close attention throughout the entire research process to the importance of family normativity considering not only that many informants were married and do not have children but that these also represented contentious issues within several relationships. Thus, my own family status was at times an asset to the fieldwork, however, I attempted also to be mindful to how my own values could have played a
role in influencing informant encounters with me, both within interviews and outside of interviews.

Articulating how this thesis could impact the social relations of informants also raises issues of anonymity. If informants so desire, qualitative research should ensure confidentiality (Tracy, 2013). Throughout the thesis informant names are anonymized to protect privacy. Protecting identities by altering names though, is not enough. I have also attempted to limit informant descriptions in order to prevent the possibility of inferring identities from the text. This highlights a dilemma between being able to thoroughly analyze and present data and protecting informant privacy. There are no simple solutions to such dilemmas, it is the responsibility of the researcher to comprehensively think through the impact participation might have for people taking part (King & Horrocks, 2010). I do, however, argue that the chapters that follow adequately strike a balance between privacy and analytical clarity.

In addition, research informants were asked about their relationships in separation that in some cases produced intimate details that if seen by other informants may have both positive and negative effects on relationships. Here, it is important to note that this study is not aimed at or did not attempt to oblige informants to reveal overly personal information. The fieldwork mirrored that of Madianou and Miller’s (2011) study, Baldassars (Baldassar, 2008; 2011) and my own previous study (Humbracht, 2015) in that many informants shared personal information that was included in the findings chapters. In order to share some findings with informants without conveying personal information or accounts, a summary sheet of findings was provided to informants that did not detail specific accounts from specific informants and informants were offered the possibility of viewing interview selections within the thesis. It should be noted, however, that instead of worries, many informants explained that they found the interviews therapeutic. This is one of the key benefits for informants that comes from ethnographic research; many studies often provide a unique opportunity to unburden themselves to a sympathetic outsider that provides therapeutic effects (Davies, 2008). Thus, while privacy must be protected, the positive side and beneficial side of discussing personal information should also not be forgotten.

Permission to use personal data and access to informants however, hinges upon well-contrived, transparent and un-coerced informant consent. Before agreeing to participant, the
researcher needs to explain the research framework and methodology, and how informants will be involved in the fieldwork and in a language that is understandable (King & Horrocks, 2010). Informants were made to understand that the findings are to be used for the PhD thesis and might be used for publication. In addition, it was made clear that informants can choose not to participate at any time before, during or after the research. Therefore, all information about the study was explained in person, in Italian and all informants signed an informed consent form.

In terms of access to migrant informants there is little ethical concern for power relations of coercion. Migrant informants have a similar socio-economic and mobility status to myself that both assisted in recruitment and helped to reduce problematic power relationships. Similarly, there was little cause for concern in regard to how I as a thirty-two year old American male impacted the research. While women might have felt more obligations to assist the research as a result of gender relations, I do not believe this impacted informants ability to potentially decline participation. Attention, however, was paid to the means through which migrant informants assisted in recruiting friends and family. Gatekeepers can often have ulterior motives to help recruit informants that are unknown the researcher (King & Horrocks, 2010). The same complicated politics this study has hoped to uncover could have possibly extended to motivations for recruiting friends and family. Once in the field though, assessing motivations to participate proved difficult. Attention was paid to any clear warning signs, however, most informants in Italy simply appeared to happy to help someone in contact with a close friend or family member in London. This reflected the mutual importance of relationships and the desire to be more connected.

Lastly, ethical dimensions of research also include researcher safety (King & Horrocks, 2010). In doing a multi-sited ethnography, I was aware of dangers to myself. In both London and Italy I took precautions to always have access to a telephone and notified another person that I was at the interview and made sure that someone was aware of where I was and when I would be finished. Interviews were conducted in neutral locations, where I researched the locations ahead of time. I was also in contact with my supervisors about my whereabouts before interviews and kept my mobile phone with me at all times.
5.8 Analysis of Fieldwork Material

5.8.1 Quality of Qualitative Research

The strength of qualitative research and ethnographies with participant observation is to offer in-depth knowledge. The dynamics of field relations is the means through which knowledge is produced. This stipulation has important implications for how the quality of qualitative research should be judged. Because of positivism’s dominate position within the social sciences it is important to filter out criteria of quality research grounded in positivism that can implicitly inform qualitative research design and replace them with more appropriate criteria. Qualitative research has been accused of refuting the need for validity, reliability and generalizability without offering alternative standards (Paul Salmon, 2003). To help define quality of research, I will draw largely from anthropologist Charlotte Davies (Davies, 2008) framework of quality qualitative research.

Quantitative research is often judged in terms of validity. While validity is important for qualitative research as well, the meanings between the two styles of research are different. Qualitative research should not be judged according to the rigid, homogenous and even application of statistical methods that drive quantitative research. As the knowledge produced from qualitative research stems from social relations, those relationships will almost always experience variations that make certain relations more important for fieldwork than others (Davies, 2008). Variations between relationships can be complex, indicate changing roles within the research and create different levels of access and trust. In addition, individuals are not fully consistent and may vary their own explanations reflecting the interview context. These variations are, however, invaluable to the research, as they help identify important themes within informant accounts. The aim is not to quantify, for example, intimacy between friends and family but to understand the cultural and social tensions guiding the fostering of notions of intimacy. Variations in relationships can be indicative or help the researcher better understand these tensions or how shifts in researcher-informant (even if negative) relationships can produce otherwise unseen insight into research questions.

Reliability and generalizability are also problematic in qualitative research. Davies (2008) argues that “the objects of social research only ever manifest themselves in open systems; that is in systems where invariant empirical regularities do not obtain” (p.101). As with all
knowledge, we must accept its incomplete and contingent character (Davies, 2008). Thus, another ethnographer could never repeat this ethnography in another context. To argue otherwise would be to miss the point. The aim here is not produce an ethnography that is reliable or generalizable. Instead, the goal is to achieve theoretical coherence and transferability.

Theoretical coherence throughout the study is a key criterion for judging quality. After reading a meaningfully coherent study the reader should clearly understand the purpose of the study and feel as though findings were delivered in relation to stated goals (Tracy, 2013). This includes analytical coherence. Qualitative research analysis should be developed until it works across the data sample (Peter Salmon, 2003). Rigorous analysis needs to produce theoretical conceptualizations, within particular theoretical fields, that can be transferred and used within particular theoretical fields by other researchers. This does not imply that researcher findings are empirically generalizable but instead the conclusions are seen to be generalizable in the context of a particular theoretical debate (Davies, 2008) and developed in a way that can help practitioners to think or act differently in future (Peter Salmon, 2003).

5.8.2 Thematic Analysis

In answering the research question and achieving research objectives, the aim of this research is to further conceptualize togetherness in a mobile world, and develop conceptualizations of togetherness. To do so an abductive and thematic analysis was conducted across the data with particular attention to embodied and discursive meaning. Themes are recurrent and distinctive features of participant accounts, characterizing particular perceptions and experiences (King & Horrocks, 2010). The goal was to move from abductive themes and insight to abstracted concepts that can be theoretically examined across the data set. Themes were developed from the initial interviews on through to the completion of fieldwork, and then into the formal data analysis phase. Two rounds of formal written analysis were completed (see appendix, figures seven and eight). I utilized Nvivo as an analytical tool to help organize themes, compare themes and develop concepts.

Before detailing some dominant themes that arose from the fieldwork there is an issue related to analysis that must be addressed. A key theoretical aim of the thesis is to identify and conceptualize key tensions within and between informant accounts in order to shed light on if and how meanings and forms of commitment are reconstructed, blurred, fused or transformed.
within the migration process. What are the qualities of different relationships after migration, how might they blur together and in which contexts of the life course? This does not suggest that informants are caught between tensions of norms and individual lives as is typical in a Marxist style analysis. Instead, the goal was to identify tensions that help understand what Foucault (1985) described as problemitizations. As Rose and Rabinow (2003) described “for Foucault the most profound thought is that which remains on the surface. To analyze problemitizations is not to reveal a hidden and suppressed contradiction: it is to address that which has already become problematic” (pg.13). Thus, in identifying tensions, the aim is to help focus attention on informant struggles to give form to self linked to ‘games of truth,’ or the manner in which informants link thought to practice in relationships.

In relation to the fieldwork, some of the key issues that informants identified in relation to qualities of relationships involved direction, rhythms of contact and performative roles within practices of keeping in touch. In addition, moving beyond binary configuration of subjectivity and place that encases perceptions between origin/destination or leaver/stayer also became a salient operational understanding within the fieldwork. Initially the research aimed to compare migrants with friends and family without considering the relative mobility/immobility status of those friends and family. In fact, several friends and family of migrants in London are themselves migrants, either now or in the past. This confirms the importance of focusing on the constitution of fluid subjects in analyzing migration as a series of linked lives across the life course (Findlay et al., 2015). Thus, during the fieldwork it became clear that categories such as mother, daughter and grandmother are betwixt with genealogies and other categories related to mobility and immobility. Personal communities in this research are thus temporal snapshots of movers and non-movers, migrants, stayers, leavers, return migrants, international and domestic migrants whose position is constituted inter-subjectively. These personal communities are multisited communities that relationally inter-locate relationship qualities and commitments through moments of mobility and immobility in addition to other life course moments.

Furthermore, while the research originally prioritized the life course moments of migrants and their time abroad in the research design, genealogies of relationships and the composition and intersection of different life course moments of each personal community proved to be crucial in theorizing togetherness of personal communities. Children, for example, both in
migration contexts or non-migration contexts play a key role in steering direction and rhythms of VFR and ICT contact, and thus constituting the relationships themselves. The amount of time abroad between cohorts did not appear important except in relation to relationships developed in London that was more predominant in cohort two. These relationships contributed to migrant trajectories by confirming desires to stay. Importantly, though, informants often discussed local and non-local relationship in similar terms involving current life course moments, feeling their importance, and making an effort for contact which highlighted both the importance of affect in transcending time and space and an evaluative quality of who keeps in touch both locally and non-locally. The findings chapters reflect this determination. In terms of analysis, the balance between cross-case and in-case analysis should fit the particulars of the study (King & Horrocks, 2010). Thus, the analysis focused more on in-case analysis, analyzing each personal community in separation and their life course makeup.

In contrast to other studies of personal communities, this research goes beyond studying tensions between norms and lived experiences present in individual accounts and instead has aimed to compare perspectives within personal communities. This form of analysis enables a comparative perspective that highlights convergent and divergent meanings and measures of relationships. For instance, the descriptions and qualities of relationships described by migrants often contrasted with perspectives that emerged from interviews with friends and family. As with Madianou and Miller (2011), had I not interviewed friends and family the research would have offered a fundamentally different picture. Most importantly, I would have had a significantly rosier picture of translocal relationships that could inadvertently downplay the theorizing of friction and affective dis-location. In yet another way, interviewing a wider range of informants offered a better understanding of the more situated dynamics that shapes trans-local relational ontologies.

The comparative component of the research has also helped to tease out tensions *across* personal communities and across time. An important tension that arose from the fieldwork, which serves to understand and organize themes, was a tension between continuity and change in relationships. This tension often arose implicitly in relation to a series of different themes and key aspects of relationships. On one side, in describing importance, informants would often go to great lengths to convey that relationships and identities had been unaffected by migration in
terms of dynamics, connection, intimacy, copresence and despite changes in the life course. On the other side, interviews with both London migrants and friends and family often heavily focused on change to life course trajectories through personal development that in concert mobilized expectations of change for loved ones. In addition, when asked about practices of keeping in touch several changes became apparent in spatiotemporal mechanics of co-presence, the terms and ethics of relationships, familiarity and intimacy, and difficulty or ease in imagining life course changes such as migration itself or having children. In addition, this tension also emerged as an explicit and often contentious aspect of relationships that served to legitimize or delegitimize migration. For instance, in comparing interviews, changes or continuities in intimacy and different forms of copresence often became political fodder in relationships that underpinned support or frustrations with moving abroad.

Thus, personal development and feelings of continued intimacy and belonging in relationships become dominate themes in fieldwork. Informants displayed high degrees of reflexivity, even for those who left amidst the crisis, migrating was overwhelming linked to personal development and indeed difficulties with employment and personal relationships that inflected national belongings. Migrants did not, however, communicate a desire to escape but more a desire to re-make themselves by including new and old relationships wherever possible. In regards to continuity, what became clear is that the continued sense of intimacy and desire for intimacy was often derived from perceptions of relationships in terms of how they felt during practices, the kinds of hopes and possibilities they afforded, and permanence. Whether you were a mom or a best friend, a migrant or non-migrant, relationships were valued in how they felt durable and eclipsed context. In addition, these feelings appeared to be articulated through routines and attempts at stabilizing routines that intertwined with personal development. Which suggested thinking of keeping in touch as rhythms.

While hopes and feelings of permanence were important, different levels of commitment were clear from different relationships even if migrants did not feel close, like with in-laws. What’s more, those commitments were often a key part of the politics of relationships, inter-relationships and informed by relationships histories. In the literature, focus has often been on what was loosely termed ‘those who actively keep in touch’ (Baldassar, 2007a; Cronin, 2014). There is, however, considerable variation in levels of commitment between those who actively
keep in touch. The extent to which people committed appeared highly relational and dependent on the particular make-up of life course moments with a personal community. It is important to bare in mind that most migrant informants are in their early thirties to early forties. Most of the people I interviewed had just left home or in the past few years, are starting their own families, starting careers, or are trying to gain independence from family. Thus, an important aspect of the analysis became understanding how informants managed shifting identities and the kinds of commitment to others this management produced.

5.8.3 Limitations

A limitation of the fieldwork and analysis, though, is that the research analysis does privilege migrants in London. Migrants were interviewed twice while friends and family were interviewed once. The shifting life course moments of informants abroad was a crucial theme during interviews, however, there is an imbalance in knowledge between migrants and friends and family abroad. A richer perspective of friends and family’s daily lives is beyond the grasp of the research.

In addition, due to time constraints there was no attempt to interview or examine in depth relationships that had become entirely inactive. The research does not attempt to explain different degrees of disconnection across entire personal communities. An important caveat, though, is the importance of affect over the life course. Informants sometimes de-prioritized keeping in touch in light of the fact that they felt connected, a finding that reinforces recent literature on friendship (Cronin, 2014), which was only reinforced by the fact that several relationships had fallen out of touch and in certain moments though became important again later on. This was also relevant for kinship as well, as there were several instances were family members were out of touch for long periods yet informants felt they were a part of their lives. Thus, research in the future might focus on longitudinal methodologies assessing the contexts and conditions under which relationships disconnect and re-connect.

5.9 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to outline the research methodology and fieldwork strategy that was used to understand how ethical imaginations of togetherness are constituted from how migrants and friends and family utilize ICT and VFR practices for maintaining relationships. The methodology is grounded in an interpretivist epistemology and ontology. The philosophical
underpinnings helped to frame a qualitative methodology informed by mobilities studies, and a focus on understanding socialities as phenomena with discursive and embodied dimensions. The chapter then described the research sample and research strategy. The study employed a multi-sited ethnography that was carried out mostly in London and different locations in Italy over a period of about eight months.

In conducting analysis the research highlighted a key tension around continuity and change in relationships. To begin to explain this tension the thesis will first describe the key personal communities encountered during the fieldwork. This will help the reader gain a more detailed overview of how this tension emerges in different relationships while providing a general description of the personal communities in order to familiarize the reader with informants. Chapter seven will then argue that this tension is productive of what Arjun Appadurai (2006) has termed the fantasy of wholeness. Wholeness is not understood as stemming from an essentialist notion of selves or communities, instead they are envisioned potentials in geographies of affect, imaginations of self and relationships as rooted, permanent and deep. Fantasy is both productive of and produced from keeping in touch. The constitution of a mobile personal ethics of self produces desires and felt and imagined potential of personal communities as unified trans-local communities. From there the thesis will further analyze this tension in chapter eight to show how this tension both makes intimacy possible and renders it an obstacle to re-shaping intimate relations. The last chapter will explain this tension in relation to the production and management of friction that both fosters and inhibits the distribution of identity and responsibility within personal communities. The thesis argues that these chapters meet the goal of achieving theoretical coherence and transferability. As theoretical coherence through out the study is a key criterion for judging quality, the thesis argues that the research methodology and subsequent process of writing up has met standards of quality for qualitative research.
6 Introducing Translocal Personal Communities: An Overview of Continuity and Change

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the personal communities of key informants and present some of the key issues that emerged from examining those communities. The chapter will highlight some important theoretical issues, in order to provide an initial guide for the analysis that will be developed through the rest of the thesis. Thus, this chapter is not intended as an analytical chapter but as a descriptive chapter that will aide the reader in becoming more familiar with migrant informants, their personal communities and the key issues shaping those personal communities.

The chapter also aims to begin detailing a counterpoint to VFR literature that has insisted on separating friends from family in analyzing personal relationships (Backer and King, 2015). Normative divisions of relationships are important in analyzing relationships, however, relationships are significantly more complex in practice. The qualities of friendship and kinship are often fluidly distributed throughout personal communities based on a variety of factors, happening within contexts of the life course, as well as within myriad overlapping political, social and economic contexts. Furthermore, imagining relationships according to normative divisions of kith and kin can take an atemporal understanding of relationships that downplays the importance of migration as a key process through which lines of kinship and friendship are blurred or reconstructed. The chapter argues for moving away from a normative model of kinship and friendship in analyzing personal relationships as they pertain to keeping in touch. Instead, the thesis argues for focusing on how migration becomes a means through which relationships construct and experience continuity and also change at a distance.

In addition, it should be noted that the following section is primarily based on migrant interviews. The rest of thesis will draw on interviews from friends and families to more extensively set out the ethical and fantasmatic dimensions of togetherness in personal communities, by offering further convergent and contrasting perspectives. The purpose of this organization is to make clear that personal communities consist of relationships of a focal person, however, those relationships are often imagined and experienced differently across those communities. In addition, the relationship maps are not shown for reasons of anonymity. Several
maps contain the names of informants within their personal community, and showing the maps could potentially compromise the privacy of informants. Thus, the maps have been omitted and instead the section describes aspects of the maps and informant interviews.

6.2 Research Personal Communities

6.2.1 Cohort One

Cohort one consists of migrants who lived in London from one to two years at the time of the interviews. The cohort includes one informant, Cadence, who is married with one child; Andrea, who has a domestic partner; and Serena, who is single.

*Cadence*

Cadence is thirty-six and had been living in London for one year and a half at the time of the interview. She is the most hyper-mobile (Cohen & Gossling, 2015) informant, with the most hyper-mobile personal community of the sample. During her life she, parents (both originally from France) and two sisters have lived in Northern Italy, the US and a city in central Italy where she completed a part of middle school, high school, medical school, surgical training and a PhD. After the PhD she and her husband decided to leave Italy because of the economic crisis and resulting lack of job opportunities. In addition, roughly one year before migrating she married her husband Franco and shortly after, but before migrating, she became pregnant. She described that she hoped to create the conditions in which her new nuclear family could grow. Furthermore, they both felt that the labour environment for doctors in Italy would not reward their ambition and instead inhibit them from advancing quickly in their careers. They then moved to France, however, they had several negative experiences and experienced some difficulties related to creating a working life with their newborn baby. Cadence was without a job and decided against staying in France until her husband found a stable situation. She then moved back to her home city in Italy to live with her mother while her husband stayed in France to work. After one year her husband moved to London for a new job and Cadence agreed to migrate again, after which she quickly found work as a surgeon.

Cadence’s personal community is based around her husband and daughter. Outside the nuclear family her relations are based primarily on friendship. She indicated that there are two friendship groups on the same level as one of her sisters who also, at least partially, is a part of the group of friends. The two groups are divided by gender; she explained though that they are
part of a common group that formed in middle school and in high school. The reason for the division is that at one point she was only a friend to the male group because she was “a bit of a tomboy.” Once she began to develop a more feminine identity, she developed friendships with the girls and the two groups became a common group. Next to each of the friends she has listed their location. Five out of eight (one friend moved to Spain just two weeks after the interview) have migrated abroad, indicating the highly mobile nature of the personal community.

Important here is that during the interview Cadence went to great lengths to convey the important and special nature of her friends (the female side), particularly over the importance of her parents (even though she chose to focus the discussion on her parents as well when asked). She explained that her friends are important because they are different from one another, in terms of professional interests, yet they have been able to have close relationships over an extended period of time. This suggests that a key quality of their group relationship is durability. In part she linked this quality to the fact that they, with the exception of one friend, were all part of the same school, an experience she felt strongly shaped their collective belonging. In addition, though, she explained that she has been very close to all of them individually at different points, for instance during parallel study periods. Cadence’s account suggests that flexibility, durability and a strong sense of belonging are important qualities.

In contrast, she has a difficult relationship with her parents who divorced while she was in high school. The divorce divided the sisters between parents with Cadence being closer to her father because she “needed a stable person at that moment.” This is reflected in the map, as her father is closer to the center than her mother. Since migrating, the relationship with her mother Bridgette experienced further difficulties, particularly during her mother’s first visit to London. They argued about money and childcare and the fact that the mother encouraged her to have another child. Bridgette left without seeing them again, however, they would later reconcile some months later. With her father, on the other hand, she described a somewhat difficult relationship in that he is “selfish,” but also that they do not see each other often because he has now retired to a ranch in Chile. After an initial visit to Chile Cadence and her husband decided not to return, but to see the father in Europe on joint holidays because the trip was too far and there was too little assistance with childcare.
Cadence has a significantly different relationship between her two sisters that is articulated according to a stayers/leavers dichotomy. One sister, Alice, is a return migrant who had lived with her father in the South Pacific for three years but decided to return after difficulties with her father. This experience has led to an attitude to reject further migration. The other sister, Marg, has lived most of her adult life abroad. She first lived in London for 10 years and she has now lived in Paris for the last two years. Cadence described that she and Marg share a common friends network, are both migrants, both have children and thus have a similar identity. They have a confidant quality to their relationship where they speak almost daily via Skype and have visited each other in London and Paris often. Cadence argues with her sister Alice often, who resists keeping in touch via ICTs and visits. Cadence explained that problems have emerged because it is difficult to find common ground. They have quite different identities that relate to personal outlooks and the fact that Alice does not have children yet. Thus, the relationship with one sister is defined through common identities based on a common friendship network and common life course moments that enables sharing, while the other is defined through a politics of expectations and resistance to keeping in touch.

Several key points need highlighting related to Cadence’s personal community. Most of Cadence’s key friendships are older schoolmates, though she also described the importance of one new friend and coworker with whom there is mutual childcare assistance. The friends name is Alba, from northern Italy, and Cadence described that Alba is approaching the same level of closeness as her old group of friends. She described that she sees this friend regularly, they often speak on the phone and via WhatsApp and they have built common respect and understanding for each other around migration and family life. This reflects, in part, the importance of migration and migration intentions of professional achievement in shaping perceptions of friendship within the life course and the growing importance of friendship in urbanization (Amin & Thrift, 2002). In addition, her most important friendship network is composed mostly of migrants who are married with children, something that is reflected in frequent WhatsApp contact. On one side this seems to suggest that relationships have continued to develop in part through common life course trajectories of migration and family. On the other side, despite the importance of the female friends, this connection can be highly imagined and affective. For instance, one friend, Lucia, moved to London (unrelated to Cadence) and the two friends have hardly seen each other. Cadence first described Lucia as very important. After which though,
Cadence explained that Lucia moved ten minutes away from her house and besides an initial encounter they did not see each other for six months. In fact, there was more contact with each other via the group WhatsApp chat than in person. Thus, despite the importance of old friends, Alba appears to play a more active role in her life in terms of virtual and physical copresence while the relationship with Lucia, despite physical proximity, appears to exist mostly digitally and in relation to the friends group.

In addition, there is also an important tension in regard to the relationship with her mother. The strong emphasis between friends over family is linked to the divorce of her parents and subsequent unmet expectations of financial support and emotional stability that has thus played a role creating an emphasis on friends as a source of fixity. Yet, despite explaining that the relationship with her mother is insignificant, Cadence described having high expectations for her mother in future plans with child care, plans that were created with her sister living in Paris. They have both encouraged their mother to sell her house in central Italy and return to France. This would then provide a holiday destination where both daughters can send their children, and that would enable both sisters to have a holiday with their spouses. In addition, Bridgette and Cadence remain in regular contact both through visits, Skype and text message. Thus, there is a joint reversal of family authority by two of the daughters in dictating the ethics of relationships based on the grandmother as a caregiver. While Cadence has emphasized friendship over family, expectations for family nonetheless play a key role in articulating aspirations for her migration trajectory.

Andrea

Andrea is from a small town outside of a major city in Northern Italy. He is thirty-six years old and moved to London with his partner Giulia almost two years ago. Andrea moved to London, in part, to further his relationship with Giulia who wanted to leave Italy. Prior to migrating, he described their relationship as on again off again, lacking commitment and permanence. Therefore, moving to London was a significant step forward in terms of commitment, overcoming previous relationship difficulties, but also because they would be living together for the first time. In the map he indicated the special status of his relationship with his partner in the size of the planets and the arrows indicating a synced orbit. He also though, wanted the opportunity for personal growth in terms of changing his personal outlook
and job prospects. In relation to his career prospects, Andrea has two masters degrees, one in Music and one in Biology. Andrea also finished two years of a PhD in Biology before dropping out due to problems with the program and lack of university career opportunities. Since moving to London, Andrea found work doing film production for a major symphony orchestra and later in a film production company. He also described himself as very sedentary and hoped that by moving to London he would be exposed to people and ideas that were outside of his normal environment. In part, this related to his upbringing in that he felt his parents could have taught him to be more independent instead of supporting him financially so that he could study.

Andrea described that after Giulia, his family is most important to him. In regard to his parents he explained this is in normative terms, “they are my parents”, but also because they supported him in pursuing his passion for music while he was growing up. He described his family as a traditional Catholic family, while both parents worked his mother took on a caretaker role. He described them all as equally important, however, in discussion there were clear lines of difference in the individual relationships. While his mother resembles him in character, his interests in the natural sciences and hiking in the mountains derived from spending time with his father in the Alps. In addition, for a period of his life he followed *communion liberation*, an anti-secular fundamentalist Catholic group with his father. Similarities and differences between parents were also apparent in keeping in touch after migration. Both parents were against his moving to London, his mother was concerned about his wellbeing while his father felt he didn’t have the financial independence to move. In the beginning, his mother played a strong role in insisting they establish regular, daily Skype contact to “check on” his well-being. Andrea described his mother’s role as passive, where she would sporadically “appear to say hello.” His father played the most active role in discussions that would eventually lead to the family gifting him a smartphone to keep in more flexible contact. In addition, his father sends him photos from trips to the mountains that Andrea then edits for him in Photoshop. During visits, differences in relationships and shifts in authority manifested. Andrea’s parents have visited London once. While his mother, who does not like to travel, agreed to a one-off visit because of Andrea’s insistence, while his father enjoyed seeing Andrea’s new life and also used the trip as a tourism opportunity. For Andrea, he mentioned that while his parents bickering was difficult for him, in coming to visit it marked a moment of growth as it indicated a shift in support for moving to London and an opportunity for them to experience something beyond their normal worldview.
Similarly, in return visits, Andrea tried to use the opportunity to cook for his mother, something he learned through his partner, in order to demonstrate an alternative to the gender roles his family is used to. Thus, in keeping in touch, while both his parents had a role of parental surveillance in the beginning, authority did begin to wane through negotiating the legitimacy of his migration, even somewhat shifting towards Andrea. In addition, the relationship with his father developed through more friend-like activities such as recreating shared interests of nature, hiking, photography and travel.

The relationship with his sister is entwined with the history of the group Andrea drew as the second most important, the friends he made in high school. The group was first formed with Andrea, Pietro, Giorgio, and Carlo. The group then expanded to include Eleanora (Andrea’s sister) and Giorgia (Pietro’s sister). Thus, while Andrea has included Eleanora and Carlo in the family group, they have also been a part of the high school group of friends. Andrea described his relationship with his sister as a good relationship. When they were young it was defined somewhat by jealousy, because she thought he was the preferred child. Later she became a part his group of friends that he described as solidifying around a common interest he introduced; heavy metal music. He described himself as “the glue,” as he sparked his sister’s and his friend’s interest in heavy metal music. In addition to music though, he attended the religious group with Pietro, who at the time was a closer friend due to their common religious outlook. After high school the group lost touch and Andrea shifted his religious beliefs. Some years later the group reconnected and began seeing each other frequently, in part, because Pietro had also shifted religious beliefs. At this point, Andrea described forming a deep connection with Giorgio. Giorgio had moved to a neighboring region in Italy and their relationship developed through a combination of intellectual stimulation and Andrea’s aid in producing Giorgio’s music. Andrea visited Giorgio and spoke with him on the phone often. Giorgio though, returned to their home city shortly before Andrea moved to London. To this point none of Andrea’s friends have visited and he maintains sporadic contact with them through ICTs, but during return visits he spends significant time with all of them. Also, in the last years the group disintegrated again, the only occasions they come together are during Andrea’s return visits once per year.

Relationship growth in Andrea’s personal community is more family centered. However, they are family relationships of choice. This is demonstrated in his relationships with his parents.
Reduced parental authority is clear in that they began to accept his life as a migrant that is entwined with his choice and their opposition to not marrying or having children. Furthermore, in practice, his relationship is more involved with his father, taking on more friend-like qualities. With friends, spending time with Giorgio during return visits has been a priority, increasing the importance of the relationship. However, because Giorgio (and other friends) have been unable to visit, in part due to a precarious work situation from return domestic migration, there is not extensive virtual co-presence and because Giorgio has not openly supported Andrea’s move, the relationship appears to be experiencing an unbalancing in terms of connection.

Also important is the fact that Andrea highlighted his growing relationship with his partner’s family. Developing a relationship with them is a key aspect of return visits. In part, this indicates a normative idea of family, however, the relationship with Giulia’s sister has particularly grown in importance. Their relationship has developed qualities like playfulness and joking that are cultivated via Whatsapp, return visits and frequent visits to London. Andrea’s relationship with his partner also intertwines democratization in that migration was seen as means to develop the relationship, in part, by constituting a domestic setting on equal standing.

**Serena**

Serena is a single, thirty-six year old events manager from Northern Italy. At the time of the interview, Serena had lived in London for over one year. Before moving to London, Serena described going through a difficult period of her life in which, due to the crisis, she lost her job and struggled to find work as an independent contractor. She moved to London in part to search out job opportunities. She also, however, described that her life in general was “stuck” in the years before moving to London. She had lived in a family-owned apartment and generally felt that she was not progressing. Therefore, she also moved to London in search of a fresh start, in the hopes that she would be able to develop several aspects of herself in a new location. Once in London Serena found a job at a large tech firm and then a smaller events management company. Support for her migration varied slightly between her parents and sister Louisella on one side and her Sister Silvia on the other. Her parents and Louisella were generally supportive of Serena’s move, though, they were “afraid I would be disappointed that it wouldn’t work.” Silvia on the other hand was fully supportive of Serena’s move and encouraged her to do so.
Serena is perhaps one of the strongest examples of attempting to attain continuity through change. While she talked at length about her life in London and how she was hoping to shift the direction of her life, she also has extensive contact with family. Serena has a family-based personal community that has shifted even more towards family since migrating. She chats with her sisters via WhatsApp everyday on the morning commute. When she comes home she often cooks and eats dinner while talking to her mother via Skype or in the evening after dinner. In addition, she returns to her home city every month to two months and has received several visits from family to London.

While she insisted that the importance between her family members was the same, in discussing her relationships with family since moving, there were clear lines of difference. Her relationships with both her mother and father have intensified since moving abroad, though, even more so with her mother. Her mother is a stay at home mom charged with raising the children. Like many other mothers in the sample, since Serena’s move, her mother had to learn to use ICTs like Skype and set up an email address (with the help of the father). Furthermore, traveling to London also marked a shift in travel behavior as the mother had spent most of her life traveling domestically for holiday. Serena described the relationship with her mother since moving in terms of emotional support. She explained that her mother “knows everything about my life,” more than with other family members, ranging from experiences with her career development to her favorite supermarket. As with Andrea’s mother, Serena’s father plays a passive role in digital contact. While he was crucial in aiding the mother to integrate technology into her daily life, he does not have much direct contact with Serena. Serena did describe, though, that before migrating her contact with her father was based mostly on weekly lunches. Now, though, through return visits and visits to London her relationship with her father had included more leisure activities, something that she and her sisters had never done with their father.

The relationship between her sisters also shifted after migrating. Both sisters live in the family’s home city, not far from their parent’s flat. With one Louisella, the eldest, Serena’s relationship became stronger through continued emotional support. As an example, Serena described that when her sister arrived at the airport in London for the first visit they both “burst into tears”. In the past, the bond was more defined through the older sister playing a semi-
parental role in terms of offering guidance, but in recent years they had started to take on more friend like qualities such as reciprocal emotional support and more intimate sharing. Thus, migration played a role in continuing to develop the siblings as friends. In contrast, Serena’s relationship with Silvia developed some difficulties after migration. Her sister began to resist having such frequent contact, telling Serena not to visit so often and tried to reduce the digital contact. Serena explained that, in part, their relationship had changed since this sister married. In addition, Louisella felt Serena was not doing enough to adapt to her new life living abroad. She often encouraged Serena to be more active and develop a more extensive social life.

In examining the relationship map her father and mother hold a key position, along with the nuclear families of her sisters, reflecting a highly normative definition of relationships. Serena did not describe having a significant individual relationship with either spouse, yet both spouses are placed in the inner circle. Importantly, the relationships with her parents and one sister appear to have strengthened, though, in qualities that more closely resemble friendship like emotional support and shared leisure activities. As mentioned, her parents were initially protective in relation to the decision to move saying that they were afraid of her disappointment. After finding work and beginning to settle into life though, the relationships developed a new sense of intimacy and emotional connection. In regard to Silvia, she has been attempting to take on a more parental role over Serena since both sisters have become adults and Silvia has married. Serena’s migration produced a context in which this type of role was furthered. During the fieldwork, however, Silvia had a child, the first child in the extended family. Between the first and second interviews, the relationship between her and her sister had improved. She described that they had more contact than before and Serena felt a strong need to be connected to her sister and the child through keeping in touch. In addition, despite frequent visits back to Italy, Serena described that she always prioritized her family over her friends. As a result, in the time between interviews, she explained that contact with her friends had diminished.

6.2.2 Cohort Two

Cohort two consists of migrants who have lived abroad for 3-10 years. Paola is married with three children; Matteo had recently entered into a domestic partnership at the time of the fieldwork, and Chiara is single.
Paola

Paola is from a city in southern Italy, she’s thirty-eight years old and married with three children. She moved to London in 2006, married her husband from Germany in 2009, had her first child 2011 and had twins in 2014. Paola moved to Ireland with a boyfriend for several months early in university but returned to complete her degree. This experience though, created an “appreciation for Anglo countries.” After completing a degree in philosophy and a masters degree in humanitarian aid work, she moved to Cambridge on a scholarship for English language development, then to London for an internship with a migrant aide organization. As with many others in the sample, Paola explained that she moved without a plan, though she did not want to stay in Italy because she felt the social environment does not support women hoping to build a career. She also explained she was looking for a place that was more cosmopolitan and multi-cultural.

On the map, Paola’s inner circle consists of her husband and three children. The second circle consists of three friends and her mother. She did not include her father who died when she was in her early twenties. As opposed to the previous cohort, one friend (from Germany) in the inner circle is a friendship she made in London, while the other three consist of a friend from middle school who now lives in Germany, a friend she met through a spiritual retreat (not necessarily Catholic) who has since moved to a city in central Italy, and a friend from university who lives in her home city and is an Italian who grew up in a central European country.

In the third circle is her brother, a group of “mum friends” she met through an NHS antenatal class, a neighbor and friend of her husband with whom she has become very close and her former boss whom she described as a close friend and mentor. In terms of relationship type, Paola’s map is the most dynamic, composed of relationships that mix old and new friends, family, work, and neighborhood. In addition, like Cadence, her personal community is highly mobile in that it is centered mostly around those who are mobile or actively support her migration through visits (to London and return visits) and keeping in touch digitally. In addition, the map also demonstrates the highest degree of shifts in relationships since migration. For instance, she explained that her friend Ennio was a part of the second circle, however, during a visit to London he struggled with being open to the travel experience, and since then the relationship has weakened. The others in the fourth level are colleagues in London she was once
close to after migrating, but who have either moved away or with whom she has struggled to develop the relationship.

During her interviews, Paola often described shared outlooks and values as important qualities across relationships. Her “mum friends” she explained are life course based - while she placed them at a high level of importance she described them as “not real friends,” though some are becoming so. When pushed further she explained that some are becoming people to discuss anything with, more than just going out with and talking about children, while with others “well, they could be brexiters”. This indicates the importance of shared values and the depth of intimacy in friendship and not simply friendship based on time. Though these qualities are also important in her oldest relationships as well.

Values are also an important part of her relationship with her mother. Paola explained she has had a difficult relationship with her mother based in part on differing ideals, saying, “she’s very very Catholic” while Paola is not and that her mother, “well she can be racist.” Thus, her motivations for migration and the relationship with her mother are closely intertwined. She described that her mother was not supportive of her migration and in the first years she hardly ever visited London (in contrast to her friends). After getting married and the birth of the children though, their relationship changed significantly. Paola described that “I’m finally a good person in (city in southern Italy) now because of Jack (her husband) and the children.” Her mother began to communicate more frequently via Skype and acquired a smart phone. In addition, she began regular visits to London. Her mother’s role, both in London and Italy, is based mostly on child care that provides Paola and Jack with leisure time (day trips, evenings out, etc.). As with Cadence, Paola explained that she has had difficulties getting her mother to accept her authority with the children over that of her mother’s. Paola and her mother were able to resolve these difficulties, which played a significant role in developing a relationship between Jack and Paola’s mother, enabling further visits.

The friendships in Paola’s personal community paint a picture that includes a strong concentration of migrants, both locally and at various points abroad. As with Cadence, she insisted there has been little change with her key friendships. In practice though, kin ties appear to be taking on a stronger role since her marriage and birth of her three children. While she does visit friends in Italy, it is the relationship with her mother and the childcare practices that affords
time together. In addition, she admitted that visits from some friends to London have lessened, her friends are not really involved with the children, and she even finds it difficult to find time for local friends. Furthermore, there is a strong contrast between her map and lived descriptions involving her in-laws (at the furtherest level) and her brother (third circle). On the map her in-laws appear as insignificant, and she described them as nice, but that she doesn’t have a strong connection. In practice, visits have become, in part, concentrated on uniting and balancing time between the three nuclear families as well as fostering relationships between them. Since the arrival of children, she described that all of their travel now involves meeting expectations to see their grandkids, which has equated to equally dividing visits or creating shared special events. To make these meetings of the in-laws work, Paola and Jack have had to manage issues as varied as competing roles in childcare to extravagant versus modest Christmas gifts. In addition, Paola showed her brother to be less significant on the map, saying that while their relationship is good, they have never been that close due to different outlooks. Since the birth of the children, though, her brother has also played a more significant role through regular visits to London where he has begun, with the help of his longtime partner, to take on and develop a childcare role that also affords Jack and Paola leisure time.

**Matteo**

Matteo is from an island in Italy, is forty years old and has lived in London for 9 years. At the time of the interview Matteo had been in a relationship for one year and was in the process of moving in with his partner. Before moving permanently to London, Matteo completed a master’s degree in economics in the UK and worked during summers in the UK while completing his bachelor’s degree. Afterwards, Matteo completed a PhD in Italy and then migrated to London with his then girlfriend. When describing his intentions to move abroad, Matteo prioritized his relationship with a previous girlfriend, his previous experience in the UK and job opportunities as motivating factors. On a more personal level though, he explained that he hoped to become more open to risk. He felt that there is a norm in Italy to be risk averse, something he felt he had internalized, yet, he hoped to grow out this outlook by moving abroad. In parallel to Andrea, migration can equally be driven by economic factors, and reflexive personal reasons, as well as the development of romantic relationships that have important implications for migration trajectories. After living in London for a few years he and his girlfriend split, something he explained provoked a high degree of personal reflection and
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questions about staying in London. For the first time in his life he was living alone (on a more permanent basis), a situation he thought created both difficulties and opportunities for personal development.

Important to note in Matteo’s personal community is that all of Matteo’s immediate family are domestic migrants. His parents moved from a small mountain village on the island to the island’s largest city after finishing high school. His father has since returned to the village to care for his elderly mother, while Matteo’s mother divides her time between the village and the city. His sister left their home city to attend university in central Italy after which she settled in the north of Italy.

Matteo placed his friends in Italy and friends in London at the same level as his mother and above his father and sister. At the beginning of the interview, he placed his friends in London over his high school friends from Italy. However, as the interview progressed he altered the map by placing two friends in Italy at the same level as his mother and London friends. Importantly, he linked the development of the relationship with one friend (from high school) to his difficulties after splitting with his girlfriend. At the time he had been out of touch with this friend for almost eight years. They then reconnected via Facebook. After which, this friend played an important supportive role in Matteo’s life that included frequent and often lengthy Skype conversations as well as a visit to London and a joint holiday to attend a wedding of a common friend. In addition, he described that he has many good relationships with his friends in London, a key part of which has been to include them in return visits on a few occasions in order to foster more common understanding of his personal history. Therefore, a key component of Matteo’s relationship with his friends is using keeping in touch for support and stitching together identities of the past and present as developed through relationships.

In addition, Matteo explained that his mother is in the inner circle due to the fact that she has adapted to his life. Contact is based mostly on frequent Skype conversations and his mother’s efforts at hosting during return visits. As with other parents, his mother became involved with his life abroad by becoming more literate with ICTs, as well as travelling to visit him in the beginning of his move. In doing so, she played an important supportive role in his migration through, for example, aiding him in the process of buying a house (both financially and in the decision process). While his father also helped financially with the house, and his father visited...
him several times early on, Matteo explained he has become more disconnected from his father, particularly since he moved back to his home village to care for the elderly grandmother. Matteo blamed this in part on the reserved character of his father, but nonetheless drew a clear distinction between his mother and father in terms of effort to maintain contact.

Matteo’s personal community is the only community in the sample where there are no children in the immediate circle. In contrast to several sibling relationships in the sample, there are no children that have generated expectations or desires to keep in touch. In the past, there were examples of common friends when growing up and after Matteo’s migration his sister visited on two occasions that also involved attempts for her to develop familiarity with Matteo’s London friends. After time, however, contact diminished. The siblings now have “long conversations on the phone” every few months and try to co-organize return visits for Christmas or summer holiday though he described the relationship as not that close. When asked about reduced contact he explained that his sister had in recent years begun to enjoy traveling abroad for tourism, something she had not done in the past and that it had become more difficult to organize encounters in their home city.

The lack of children, in part, helps explain why visits to London from family have dissipated and there are no visits between Matteo and his sister’s migration context. Without children, it would seem, family relationships and life course trajectories can become increasingly disconnected. In addition, since migrating Matteo spends almost all of his holiday time on his home island on return visits, where he can see friends and family and spend time at the families’ beach house. This is an important framing process, as he is combining ethical and market economies by using tourism to meet family expectations for return – while also developing friendships by offering his and his families resources. Visits though, he admits, can be very stressful because of his mother and her strong inclination to spend time together and organize his trips home. Thus, while his mother is important, proximity also creates tensions.

Chiara

Chiara is thirty-eight years old, she is single and has lived in London for 6 years. Chiara was born in a small city in northern Italy, where she grew up and eventually completed a degree. During her degree, she spent six months in the UK through the Erasmus program. She explained that the experience helped confirm her longtime ambition to travel and live abroad. The
opportunity came when Chiara was offered a position in a London office through her job in a patent office in Italy. She moved to London giving up a permanent contract in the midst of the crisis. When asked about the risk she explained her ambition to live in other cultures but also that she felt it was time to move out of her parent’s house and become more independent. Migrating abroad, for her, was a means through which to face an array of challenges she had never encountered.

Chiara returns to her home city every three months for weekend trips. She explained the frequency saying she has had a close relationship with her parents and they are beginning to age, which makes her want to offer more support. In addition, Chiara speaks briefly with her mom everyday on the phone. As with Serena, the relationship with her father is mostly passive. She explained that she is more similar to her father and that their relationship is easier than with her mother due to her mother’s frequent intrusiveness and expectations for further contact. Thus, while her parents are important on the map their relationship can be difficult in practice.

She described not being very close to her sister in the past, but since her sister married and moved out of the house, their relationship improved. She explained they are different, Chiara is not family orientated, loves travel, prefers to live alone, and does not like commitments while her sister is very family orientated, lives 10 min from her parents home and does not like traveling. Chiara described though that her sister visits her roughly a once a year, and that they take joint holidays in order for her to spend time with her nieces. Chiara, however, described that she has made clear to her family that she also wants to take her own holidays that do not involve family. She organizes her travel life around a “compromise” between personal holidays with London friends and visits home. In addition, contrary to her earlier statement that visits are about visiting her nieces, she explained later that she is not fond of children and tries to limit the length of stay of her sister and nieces in London as well her responsibility in caring for the nieces.

Chiara’s interviews showed a strong contrast between the map and lived experiences. On the map, her two high school friends and family are shown as the most important yet are the least involved in her daily life, especially when compared to her friends in London with whom she has an active social life. Chiara described that she wished those in Italy would visit more often as she often feels “divided between two worlds.” Her mother feels an obligation to look after the father who does not travel, resulting in only two visits in six years. In addition, daily discussions have
developed further intimacy but are often more about “checking in.” Also, Chiara’s two best friends in Italy have never visited because of difficulties with childcare and for economic reasons. Thus, Chiara described an unbalanced familiarity with her family and friends that can make it difficult to relate to her friends and family in Italy.

Between her friends in London and two close friends in Italy she explained they have similar importance, but the friends in Italy know more about her past and her history. She admitted though that if it was not for her parents, she would not travel to Italy so often and if she moved back to Italy today she is not sure what relationship she would have with her friends as they now have different lives, different lifestyles and different family situations. Also, as with Andrea, the two friends in Italy almost never see each other outside of return visits. In contrast, Chiara described how pleased she is with her life in London and the ability to spend an extensive amount of time with her friends going to the theatre, cinema, and museums, most of whom are also migrants. In fact, she described them as her “English family.” Thus, while her friends in Italy are shown on the map as the most important there was some tension in the interview trying to explain the level of importance between the sets of friends.

6.4 Conclusion

Migration can contribute to blurring and reconstructing notions of kin and kith by both elevating and diminishing certain relationships, and certain qualities within relationships across categories. On one side, there were some common themes across personal communities. Important relationships, for instance, are focused around family, older friendships from school or university, or established friendships made earlier in the migration process. While some older relationships of family and friends appeared to move out of inner circles, the most important relationships were all established relationships. There were no, for instance, digital or online friendships that have been the focus of recent research (Germann Molz, 2012). In two interviews with migrants in cohort one (recently arrived migrants), informants were hesitant to put new friendships made in London in the inner circle; they suggested though that these friends were moving towards the center. Thus, this confirms Larsen et al’s (2006a) finding that older ties have a higher likelihood of attachment and durability, and indeed this is a key focus of the next two chapters regarding fantasy. In addition, the sample highlights the extent to which the age of informants and migration are intertwined in reconstructing parental authority over adult children.
This does not necessarily mean that authority disappears; guidance and control can still play a significant role in articulating relationships. These relationships, however, become more based on negotiated choice and democratization (Giddens, 1992).

In addition however, the sample highlights the highly varied, contextual, and process orientated character of personal communities. Indeed, the sample points towards viewing personal communities as dynamic relational matrices (Long & Moore, 2013b) of linked lives (Elder et al., 2002) that are articulated through inflections of different rhythms and forms of co-presence. It is within these matrices that the importance of certain qualities and their attachment to certain relationships is determined. A friend in London’s physical copresence, expressed as help with childcare, may elevate a friend in importance, as with Cadence. It may be, however, the reduced role of guidance and more emotional support from a parent after migration that may elevate one parent in importance, as with Serena. Thus, care, such as with children, can also fall on friends. Family relationships can obviously be based on shared interests (Parks & Floyd, 1996), as with Andrea and his father, and authority can be linked to other relationships besides parents, like a sister, as in Serena’s case. It is though, the relational life course makeup of personal communities that helps determine the value and distribution of qualities.

Furthermore, the inclusion of children can play a key role in heightening political economies of control and choice. Having children creates further desire for leisure time and a desire from friends and family to keep in touch. Family can also reinforce friendship through assistance with childcare. Although not discussed in-depth here, friends can also play an important role in creating leisure time through hosting, something that often requires them to disrupt their daily lives. Thus, a key dimension here for expressions of relationships is sacrifice (Miller, 1998). In order to sync life course trajectories both parties often have to disrupt aspects of their personal lives or ambitions for individual holiday or leisure. Three of the four migrants in London who do not have children but who have nieces or nephews in Italy, cited visiting those children as a key motivation to visit Italy. Two of those migrants explained that sacrificing more regular holiday is not a problem while one migrant explained she tried to find a balance between them. Contrary to the thesis that relationship are being corrupted by market economies, the relationships that are able to combine ethical and market economies to some extent appear to be ones that adapt most to new contexts.
Furthermore, continued personal development throughout the life course is important (Elder et al., 2002). Personal development through migration is also clear in the sample. In regard to intentions, the crisis was an important factor in several informant accounts of motivations to move abroad. The search for better job prospects though, cannot be viewed simply through a lens of push factors created through shifting macroeconomic structures but as a constitution of professional identity intertwined with more personal and reflexive perceptions of place and self. Migration should be viewed as a technology of the self that constitutes a mobile identity as ethical self (Foucault et al., 2003). Keeping in touch becomes an extension those mobile ethics, fostering an identity politics of self/other relations. These politics operate within kinship and friendship structures as migrants attempt to tie together narratives of self embedded in old and new relationships that blur and reinforces subject positions of friend, mother, and sister with mover/non-mover, stayer/leaver, and migrant/tourist.

In this way, in looking at the personal communities without including perspectives from friends and family, the inter-subjective appears less salient, that can perhaps reinforce an image that normative interactions are at work. This chapter has mostly explored the perspective of migrants in order to highlight personal community as a concept and some key issues emerging from the personal communities. There were several issues that were not explored, particularly in relation to relationship histories and how they are connected to shaping migration and life course trajectories. The following chapters will build on themes explored here by including in the analysis perspectives of friends and family as well as extending analysis to areas of relationships not covered here.
7 The Fantasy of Wholeness: Togetherness as Shared Desires and Affective Attachments within Trans-local Personal Communities

7.1 Introduction

In discussing their migration the key message informants conveyed was one of change. Informants constructed narratives of becoming, which included desires, means, aspirations and experiences of change. When discussing relationships, and selves embedded within relationships, migrants offered contrary accounts that suggested continuity, permanence and authenticity. How can such contradictory narratives be understood? In the first place, we need to resist viewing contradictions in transnational relationships through a lens of conflicting ideals, such as between tradition and individualization, searching for dialectic resolution (as in Madianou & Miller, 2011). Globalization is not necessarily global in that it is not a project with a teleological undercurrent searching for semiological coherence or recognition of paradox and inconsistency between the global and local or authentic past and innovative present (Faubion, 2001) - globalization is always ongoing (Moore, 2011). Instead of viewing this contradiction as a tension between past and present we need to understand identities and relationships as contingent and shaped through connections that interrogate past, present and future (Giddens, 1992).

Migration and subsequent practices of connecting distanced imaginations of friends and family are processes that unsettle identities and sense of belonging through a process Foucault called problematization, leading to ethical economies of care for the self (Foucault, 1994). This entails a series of conditions, within particular contexts, that disrupts the familiar permitting the self and self-other relations to be made into objects of thought for transformation. Thus, migration helps foster a process in which re-constituting identity and belonging becomes a crucial quality for judging the value of important relationships within personal communities, a quality that supersedes borders of kin and kith, local and non-local. Problematization, though, is always more than a work of thought, as it also involves affect, fantasy, performance, relationships with objects, technologies and the material world (Moore, 2011). Thus, to understand contradiction, this chapter argues for viewing the contradiction presented by informants as fantasy, a fantasy of wholeness – a shared affective structure of optimism for solid intimacy intertwined with an inter-subjective relational ethics for connection to co-develop identities and belonging attached to certain life course moments and within trans-local personal communities. Migrant informants use migration as a technique for re-making the self that
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Involves a series of processes of subjectification that links the self to a definition of migrant as ethical subject, and constitutes migration as ethical. Or a means to establish a relation with self that frames practice, what counts as experience, forming a personal regime of self-governance that allows the self to be monitored and adjusted through time. A crucial means for developing the self is through self-other relations, and the cultivation of a relational ethics that ties selves to others locally and trans-locally. Thus, migrant mobility is not a process of individualization as has been described by some scholars (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014), but a means for reconstructing selves through the fostering of new relationships and reimagining old ones. In keeping in touch, migrants and some friends and family constructs felt presence (Cronin, 2014), or a sensed potential for solid intimacy. In this way, seemingly different categories like friend or family, local/non-local are subsumed under the felt potential for promises of relations of permanence. This kinaesthetic impulse creates an affective drive for migrants and friends and family to re-make selves in parallel, within particular life course moments that extends horizons of belonging trans-locally. Namely, informants transform themselves into imagination brokers; a form of ethical subjectification that crosses kinship and friendship, local and non-local, stayer and leaver and defines connecting imaginations as ethical practice. A sense of wholeness is enabled, in part, in how informants utilize digital and physical hosting and guesting, to continually identify in practice the manner in which imaginations can be connected and co-constructed. In this sense, becoming an imagination broker creates an ethics that crosses physical and digital spaces and ICTs do therefore not produce relationships but help enhance informants’ capacities (Moore, 2011) to leverage them together in order to imagine biographies as linked.

Importantly, the felt presence implicit to the fantasy of wholeness is constructed and sustained through the formation of eurhythmic rhythms of digital and physical co-presence. As rhythms are normalized differences between forms of co-presence begin to melt together that reinforces common ethics of connectedness and a felt, authentic sense of intimacy despite the distance. This continuity is a form of belonging as mobile taken-for-grandness (Fallov et al., 2013); established co-embodied rhythms provide the trans-local ethical and sensed coordinates for belonging within intimate relations. In addition, imagination brokers form a group or set of relationships within personal communities that maybe connected or not. While in practice there is no rigid division between imagination brokers and those who are not, many in personal communities who do not actively seek to connect biographies may share common features with
imagination brokers. For the sake of analysis, however, this chapter aims to highlight some of the key means through which fantasy and an ethics of imaginations broker is constituted and how a trans-local sense of belonging across certain relationships is constructed and distributed within personal communities.

### 7.2 Migration as Care for the Self, Process and Problematization

#### 7.2.1 Problematizing the Sedentary Self, Belonging and Relationships

A clear theme that emerged from migrant informants was that their intention to migrate, and indeed their intention to stay, was linked to a desire to change and develop selves. This theme acted as an overarching principle encompassing both professional and personal areas of life. Developing the self through mobility, whether leisure or migration, is not new to academic literature. Thus, the aim here is not to theorize the development of the self per se, but to highlight how change or development of self is implicated in the remaking of self-other relations through problematization of self and belonging, and re-imagining sociality. In contrast to Foucault’s emphasis on problematization as thought or reflection though, Moore (2011) argues it also involves affect, emotion, performance, fantasy, and relations with objects, technologies and the material world (Moore, 2011).

Of the six primary migrants interviewed, five cited a precarious employment situation linked to the crisis as one of the factors in deciding to move. One informant, though, left a job with a permanent contract and thus she explained that the crisis played a role in assessing the risk of moving and not staying, or to the potential of failing in London as she would have forfeited her previous employment contract.

Globalization, the resulting potential for mobility, and the crisis, have contributed to the problematization of sedentary selves. While the crisis was an important issue for migrants in pushing further, the common theme that emerged was a desire to develop the self across many areas of life. Serena, for instance, explained that while losing her job and subsequent employment difficulties were important in her decision to move, the key reason was more related to her understanding of self:

I think I was a bit stuck, in some way. So I felt that things were not moving and sometimes I think it’s more scary, to think that nothing is going to happen in your life.
Sometimes people are scarred about what can happen I think, sometimes its more scary things that may not happen. So I think it was a choice that I gave myself, an opportunity to make new things happen in my life.

The link between mobility as progress and becoming was a common trope in interviews. The search for becoming and change is not, however, an ‘impact’ of globalization and the crisis. While specific social, economic and political processes have contributed to the process of problematization within a general terrain, they do not completely determine its form and character. Historically specific transformations are never a direct consequence or expression of socioeconomic and political change, but are instead a set of located and embedded responses that take particular forms (Moore, 2011). Thus, the crisis cannot be seen as a direct cause of migration. Instead it helped create the conditions, in which the self can be made into a question: A question that provoked many informants to highlight the importance of independence. Before migrating, several informants described a general lack of independence and life skills that was inhibiting personal growth. Many informants lived with their parents or in a house owned by their parents, something they felt contributed to a lack of independence and self-confidence that would help them improve all areas of their lives. In this way, instead of relying on friends and family, migrants make the fostering of independence a key principle for care for the self. Thus, through migration, they identify a series of mundane practices that would become a mode of self-making:

I’ve had to mature in certain sense. Because, anyway, not being at home anymore with mom and dad, I had to think about everything, about every little thing… the house, work, decisions, I come home, cooking, cleaning, absolutely everything. So from that point of view it (migrating) was a huge change, I think also a necessary and positive one.

For informants, migration is a mode of transformation, of thought and embodied practice that organizes technologies of the self, used to develop the conditions in which the self can be transformed. Conditions, where technologies of the self enable self-actualization and the individuals’ ability to become happier and wiser (Molz, 2004). Problematization, though, in being fundamentally political, entails a questioning of self-other relations and meanings of belonging implicit in those relations. Moore (2011) argues the most crucial aspect of globalization is that it acts as a diacritic, interrogating our relations with others, of what we
share, of how we set our personal and political horizons, the character of forms of belonging and the complex relations they entail. Informants in the sample explained that they wanted to move, in part, because of frustrations they linked to Italy or the nation. Several described difficulties they experienced in work place settings that they felt were characteristic of Italy: Many lacked meritocracy, were guided by nepotism and for many of the female informants, they had had negative experiences related to gender or felt generally that Italy did not create equal opportunities for women. Thus, many explained that migration became an opportunity to constitute certain values and different outlooks than they found in Italy. Living in London offered the chance to open selves to new cultures, to embody a more cosmopolitan and multicultural lifestyle.

It was clear, though, that problematizing self-other relations and belonging was also linked to intimate relations, namely personal relationships. Thus, in addition to selves, migration also involves making personal relationships into objects for transformation as well. Andrea, for instance, described his long-standing wish to travel abroad in order to understand different cultures and constitute a more open worldview. When asked why he had not already done so, he described himself as sedentary in nature and lacking the necessary independence. He explained this, in part, by linking his independence to his parents’ upbringing that was “typically Italian” in that you should always rely on your family and stay close to home, something he found problematic:

I was always a bit too conditioned by them, because they were supporting me. So I felt yeah okay, as long as I can do stuff (...) But I told them that you should try and educate your son to be able to make it on his own. Because if your parents help too much you get lazy. Like, they never wanted me to have a job when I was studying, also because I was living there. I would have liked to be more independent before, but, on one side, it’s easier because you wouldn’t have to worry about things, but also its more difficult when you have to face problems.

Thus, Andrea is simultaneously outlining the principles of independence and self-reliance to guide his conduct and problematizing his personal biography that calls into question those principles in relation to belonging and how belonging is related to personal relationships. This is an integral part of the migration process that continues long after arriving in migration
destinations. Matteo, for instance, explained that a crucial aspect of his life in London over the past ten years has been the development of an ability to be more risk adverse. Importantly, though, he did not discuss this development in isolation, but when discussing differences with his closest friends in Italy and London:

There is a reason why some people are here and some people are there. I think, people in (home region) tend to be, uh, less risk adverse, which is unfortunately a feature I think I inherited from my culture. But, for me, for example, from a person who is very reluctant to change jobs, I understood that it’s not so scary, it’s a part of life (...). I think people that live here have to be like this, either adapt or you can’t survive, I think people who stayed there, haven’t gone beyond these limits.

Matteo is linking his personal development through migration to key personal relationships in Italy by defining ethical behaviour as risk taking. In doing so, he makes clear the underlying tension in how belonging is problematized and attached to different relationships throughout the migration process.

7.2.2 New Relationships and Migrant Trajectories

For many informants, while aspects of self and belonging are destabilized through relationships, selves and belonging are also re-constructed through new relationships. New relationships constitute personal biographies that both generate and stabilize migration trajectories. Thus, new relationships become a key means through which selves are problematized and developed. Romantic relationships are a key means for that development. Migration can be a joint project of constituting the self within a couple. Those in the sample who migrated with a spouse/partner, all explained the importance of moving abroad as a means to constitute themselves as a couple, both in terms of the internal relationship dynamics and relationship identities. This became especially clear in talking to Andrea and his partner Giulia. The couple was interviewed separately; both, however confirmed that migrating in part stemmed from difficulties both had had with professional lives as natural science researchers. In addition, both also agreed that migrating was primarily Giulia’s initiative, who had already lived abroad and that Giulia provided the necessary “push” that Andrea needed to challenge himself to reshape his world view.
In addition, migration can be a method of resolving relationships difficulties, a form of becoming as a couple where the progress of relationships is linked to migrant mobility. Giulia explained in her interview that she and Andrea “needed to start with a fresh attitude and obviously being in a different place might help.” She went on to explain that their relationship had been on and off again for years and lacking commitment. If their relationship was to grow, it required further commitment by moving in together, but more than anything they needed to grow together:

The problem was I was thinking more about me, and he wanted to us to be a couple. Probably he had more sort of a traditional idea of a couple…like always doing things together and speaking on the phone all the time. That’s immature sort of, I mean, its not like two grown-ups, I mean we were younger…When your relationships are more mature you probably don’t think about it. And he thought that was normal and I thought that’s normal for some. Then I think he realized that he also isn’t that type of person, always thinking about a ‘we’. Obviously, you have to do a bit of that when you’re a couple. But we also accepted that we are two sort of lonely persons.

Migration is a vehicle for personal development through romantic relationships that constitutes an ethics of selves as individuals and a couple. Here, Giulia is suggesting that migration helped problematize “traditional” levels of autonomy within relationships, instead what becomes ethically sound is a lesser degree of integration in daily activities. What’s more, through migrating, Andrea also hoped to build an open and multicultural outlook similar to Giulia’s; Thus, linking care for the self to a sense of belonging, of multiculturalism, and shaping aims for migration.

New friendships in London are also a key means through which the ethical self is developed. After discussing key aims and intentions, the second interviews moved into examples of satisfactions/frustrations with the actualization of those intentions. An overarching theme was that friendship played an important role in articulating migrant identities and confirming migrant trajectories or desires to stay. Friendship has no doubt become a motivating force in cities, becoming a form of new family that people choose (Amin & Thrift, 2002). Several migrants explained that friends became like a second or substitute family that entailed common identities and expectations for support. Andrea for instance, described being pleased to have developed
friends from different cultural backgrounds with whom he could share his musical interests. Chiara described that her independence had been realized to a great extent with two friends that share an interest in film, theatre and food. She explained that in contrast to her life in Italy, she goes out almost every evening with friends to enjoy London’s cultural scene.

Importantly, informants linked developing friendships and selves through friendships, to staying in London. Most migrants described never having had a concrete plan for migration, but rather a series of aspirations (as described above), and staying was no different. A few informants described that there has always been a possibility to leave, however, new friendships contributed significantly to a sense of wanting to stay. Matteo for instance, said that after breaking up with his long-time partner (with whom he migrated) he went through a difficult period, in which he seriously considered leaving. He explained though, that developing strong, new friendships in combination with achieving independence, aided his decision to stay. With friends, he explained that, “well, I just realized that I have friends that are equally important here to those in Italy. I was surrounded by many friends.” His ability to make good friendships and the new realization of independence contributed to his staying in London:

I had the opportunity for the first time in my life to be completely alone. Not with a partner, not with the family. So I started to live alone for a few years, which actually made me appreciate many things, time to reflect. Probably I thought about things I had never thought about before, like how can I handle things alone. You know, what kind of skills can I develop, and am I happy with my self.

The formation of ethical principles, outlooks and attitudes, here related to independence, are developed in part through friendships that lead to staying. Informants made clear that migration was a means to manage and alter the self. One of the most crucial means for doing so, is through new and old relationships. Yet, particularly when discussing themselves and relationships in Italy, many informants passionately described the extent to which both they and their relationships remained unchanged. How are we to make sense of these paradoxical accounts? Why do informants speak so urgently about problematizing selves and self-other relations yet simultaneously insist on their continuity?
7.3 Linking Trajectories, Constituting Shared Fantasy and Imagining Conduct of Connection

7.3.1 Feeling the Potential for Wholeness

A starting point is recognizing that personal biographies become attached to relationships at various transnational sites through migration (Cronin, 2014) and thus a sense of self and belonging is distributed across transnational space. ICTs and visits create a form of sensed co-presence (Cronin, 2014), making people feel connected even if apart, providing an affective or felt sense of continuity and intimacy within personal communities. For instance, when asked if their relationship had changed, Paola’s close friend Anna who migrated to Germany 10 years ago replied firmly: “No, because in a deep way, we have both stayed true to ourselves. Despite everything that’s happened…if we start to forget ourselves, it’s enough just to meet to remind us again, or a phone call, or an SMS.” Both friends or family described that physical and digital co-presence created a sense of continuity or feeling that “its like we just saw each other yesterday”.

More specifically, co-presence induces fantasy, or the felt possibility for enacting imaginations of the good life, composed of solid relationships and dependable intimacy despite contrasts to lived realities. The combined physical and digital environments create affective atmospheres of what Berlant (2011) has called aspirational normativity. Importantly, in relation to the research objective of understanding differences between friends and family, this thesis argues that this felt potential is distributed between the most important relationships that include both friends and family. Thus, keeping in touch are situations of absorption orchestrated by migrants and friends and family (ibid) to feel an affective certainty of seemingly permanent relations and that blurs differences between kin and kith simply in how these relations offer the potential for solid relations. How people send text messages, the visual interactions on Skype, chatting in a café during a visit, or playing with grandchildren form a kinaesthetic fantasy, and indeed sense of reality for a highly subjective feeling of ‘normalcy.’ Key to this fantasy is optimism. One informant described her overall hope to exploit ICT’s, return visits, and visits from friends and family to London for personal relationships in the future:

I don’t want to have two separate lives. A nice life in London, where I feel comfortable and a nice life in (in Italy)...I want a kind of interaction between the two worlds so I just want one, that’s all, just one life.
All attachments are optimistic in nature (Berlant, 2011). The optimism expressed here, which is connected to a visit, is for wholeness, or for lasting intimacy attached to the most important relationships of both friends and family in Italy and London. Thus, this thesis’s use of the terms is significantly different from Appadurai’s (2006) notion of wholeness, as his argument relates to identity and belonging as imagined at a national level, and as constructed through state techniques of census and quantification. Instead, the fantasy of wholeness, here, has two elements. First, drawing on Berlant (2011), it refers to a shared translocal relation of optimism, where key kin and kith relationships become objects of desire, creating attachments whose affective structure compels informants to the potential for good life promises of durable intimacy and normative reciprocity. Copresence with important friendships was unanimously described in felt, quasi-utopian terms, in which present disruptions could not impede potential futures together, Paola said as much when describing visiting Anna:

I feel super comfortable (with Anna). You don’t need to think about what you’re saying. We can spend a day in our pyjamas talking, it’s great. The kind of relationship for life, obviously, it’s always been like that. We became very close very quickly and never grew apart despite the fact we have different lives and are quite different people.

Affect, like discourse, is constructed (Moore & Clarke, 2016). Relationships become embedded with promises for lasting intimacy, or better, with promises for the possibility that durable friendship is still possible despite shifting selves and relations after migration. For migrants, daily life largely entails operating along translocal matrices of relationships, each with different experiences and coordinates of self. Keeping in touch perpetually unsettles the self, creating an on-going ontological anxiety and uncertainty. Keeping in touch, though, also generates fantasy as an anti-dote to that anxiety. The fantasy for the good life and its proximate cluster of promises, become spaces of collective relief and speculative intimate tethering (Berlant, 2011), helping migrants and friends and family to find traction in a shifting world. This traction is shared and distributed across personal communities and articulated within particular life course moments, often with children playing a crucial role. Cadence’s mother Bridgett, for instance, described how despite the fact that her two daughters and their kids live abroad, and she herself being a migrant living in Italy for over two decades, the hope and potential attached to those relationships are animating features in her current life course moment and her potential
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return/retirement migration. Despite difficulties with Cadence, she plans to move back to France after retiring. Her retirement will enable her to have a new start, meet both her daughters’ expectations to provide a holiday destination for their children and spend more time with the children, which offers some respite:

Since I got divorced the second time, and also the girls left home, I know that my eyes are different, there’s a little sadness. Now that I’ll be retiring - thank God for the grandkids - I’ve got a project. I can say ‘okay girls, you’re working, send me the kids and I’ll take them to the zoo, to the beach, to museums, to play, to read’. Thank God, there’s a project for life through the kids, also friends. If not, I’m going to an island and it’s over.

Crucial to note is how tourism, migration (both to London and retirement migration) and kinship are not imposing forces re-structuring sociality, but become ingredients to be mixed into the stew of fantasy as an enabling force within the life course. Fantasy, though, while always being a means to manage the uncertainty of the future, may not always materialize in such concrete plans. The feeling of continuity in relations can be informed by the past, with vague or concrete ideas for the future, or for some relationships (in contrast to those in the next chapter) can act for developing the present. As identities are destabilized, the result is not a form of nostalgia for solid togetherness. Instead, this thesis argues keeping in touch produces a forward-looking desire for an opening of self-other relations that enables the continued development and co-constitution of migrant selves and proximate others. Development, however, is not simply about affect and feeling, but the work of thought, ethics and imagination.

7.3.2 Problematizing Selves with and for Others, the Making of Imagination Brokers

The second element of the fantasy of wholeness is ethical. Intimacy is not simply something that is felt or the works of bio-matter constantly flung against other bio matter (Long & Moore, 2013a), but involves ethical selves, strategy, and thus agency, satisfaction and potentially achievement. Intimacy, in other words, is a matter of problematization, interpretation and strategy that has enabling and disabling effects (disabling effects are discussed in the next chapter). Importantly, this thesis argues that migrants and some friends and family transform themselves into trans-local imagination brokers: A contemporary form of embodied and contingent ethical subjectification, encompassing migrants and friends and family, that shapes a duty or commitment to foster and connect imaginations of self to others that blurs categories of
friend/family, tourist/migrant, local/non-local and stayer/leaver. While the importance of imagination in fostering connections has been well discussed in globalization theory (Anderson, 2006; Appadurai, 1996; Urry, 2007), I wish to take this understanding a step further by arguing that connecting imaginations has become a form of situational ethical stylization. This duty constructs cognitive desires for re-developing relations by making the self knowable through relations with others. It is a mode of self-governance that interprets and intervenes in daily life by acting as a principal identifying and constructing daily conduct in terms of ICT practices, temporal rhythms of travel, performances during visits and horizons of belonging that orient the self trans-locally and attaches selves to others. This suggests viewing personal communities not as groups of friends and family, but containers of variations and divisions of imagination brokers.

A crucial first component in fostering imagination brokers is problematization. Recasting social relations always involves being both yourself and being other to yourself in ways that create new possibilities for imagining self-other relations (Moore, 2011). Departing loved ones incurs a process or at least is linked to broader processes of problematization of self and self-other relations. Some informants though, and not others, choose to make keeping in touch a key means through which to develop selves, within certain moments of the life course, and in parallel to those who migrated abroad. Several informants interviewed in Italy discussed their self-development related to employment, personal life, moments of the life course, leisure habits, and crucially, how becoming an imagination broker through virtual and physical forms of keeping in touch was linked to that development. Cinzia, for instance, a close university friend of Paola explained that she had gone through a difficult period in her life, in which she was professionally unsure of her direction and a few of her best friends (including Paola) had migrated to Paris and London: “Every time it’s terrible, when a friend leaves. You’re happy for them, you know that’s what they want, but it creates an imbalance. Several went away, I had a period where my best friends left. I was depressed.” After initial difficulties though, Cinzia described that she decided to adapt by using a combination of technology, her work and leisure life. In parallel, she started her own tech company, which required her to travel often and she also travels as a DJ. In addition, she is single, saying that her relationship status helped to do more with her work and improve her ability to keep in touch with friends. Overall, however, she
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explained the importance of reorienting herself around connecting, using the different areas of her life to do so:

I got used to the idea...It becomes about creating occasions, often I go to Paris to play music, then I meet friends, I created the occasion...Facebook gives us the occasion for everyday contact...also Whatsapp, voice messages, pictures, when I want news of the kids (Paola’s), I tell her to send me pictures and tell me how they are. They’re beautiful.

Connecting imaginations becomes a means and indeed an ethical principle for transforming the self and tethering to others, and a means for recognizing the self in daily life. Cinzia visits London and Paris on an ongoing basis and uses ICTs regularly. The VFR literature has emphasized the importance of people combining business or leisure trips with seeing friends or family and, in separation, digital communication (Backer & King, 2015). What needs to be highlighted, though, is the underlying identity politics and sense of agency that connects them. Cinzia indicates that these trips are linked to the development of self, through a repositioning and realization of a mobile self in relation to migrant others. Moreover, problemitization of self and the choice of remaking self-other relations is in itself a form of care that crosses a variety of categories like kinship and friendship. Almost all informants, whether friends or family, described in this section displayed overcoming obstacles or previous perceptions related to travel or ICTs in some way. Some migrants, despite having migrated, loathe travel or the use of some or all ICTs and had to adapt; some, for instance, used ICTs or bought smart phones for the first time. Equally, non-migrant informants described travelling abroad or using ICTs for the first time, or having to make important modifications to already established practices. Paola’s mother, Flavia, for instance described her difficulties with travel and digital communications and that she had a strong desire to overcome them. As with Brigitte above, keeping in touch produced the hope and fantasy for solid bonds within a context in which she was a widow, having additionally lost a sister and a close friend. Flavia, described that her efforts for keeping in touch drew from the hope that her son would marry and have children and for Paola’s three children to one day come to visit them: “I would like very much that the kids come to see their cousins, that they create that kind of comradery between kids. That’s what I want: the big family, to have again a big family.” Importantly, though, while fantasy is a productive force, the work of ethical thought is equally important in bringing about transformation. It entails becoming an imagination broker,
or developing the self through ICTs and travel requires making the self into an object, in regard to travel abroad and being a mother in order to connect with her life, Fulvia explained this by saying:

So, I had to do a sort of violence against myself. I said ‘no, I have to go alone, to a foreign city’…I had never taken a plane before, I went to (the UK) to see her, and for her, I overcame all my fears to reach her. She saw this and I think it reassured her through the years, despite the distance I was there for her, concentrated on her, on what she was doing, on what she wanted to do, to support her.

Problematization with and for others is a key component driving the construction of desire for contact between friends and family. Overcoming obstacles of digital and physical mobility produces satisfactions and thus, is a key aspect of re-making selves in order to forge new socialites. Cinzia also described difficulties with flying, saying that to overcome her fear she is “always drunk, every time, it’s terrible”. The propensity to re-think selves, and embodied selves happens across categories of friendship kinship, age, class and gender. The common thread is a commitment to developing a relational ethics of constructing and distributing imaginations of self and others trans-locally.

7.3.3 Circulating Selves, Situating Others – Hosting, Guesting and Making the Familiar Strange

The key idioms through which imagination brokers identify and modify ethical practice is through digital and physical hosting and guesting, or by continually interpreting and translating others into daily life. Problematization of self is more than a process of mobilization of self - it also entails a process of mooring self in relation to others through hosting along circuits of digital and physical mobility. Hosting during visits to migration contexts has been shown as a means through which migrants connect imaginations and constitute identity by presenting highly selective aspects of daily life while interpreting the identities of friends and family in order to locate them in spaces and intimate avenues of migrant life (Humbracht, 2016). This process, however, is part of an on-going ethical economy of selves and others that entwines both digital and physical spaces and blurs distinctions between subjects like friend and family, tourist and migrant, stayer and leaver. Thus, problematization happens through informants distancing themselves from their daily lives, developing selves through combinations of digital and physical mooring and mobility.
In regard to visits to migration contexts, an important nuance to previous research is that the co-constitution of identity and belonging is a crucial means through which some identities, and thus trajectories, across personal communities become synced and others not. Paola, for instance, when describing hosting friends and family and in London compared Cinzia with a good friend, Marco, that has faded some in importance:

I could see the way they handle London when they come and see me, it’s completely different. They relate to London in a different way, Cinzia embraces it with open arms. She seems to try new things. With Marco, I would have to think really hard on what to do and where to go, whereas with Cinzia, I could just take her to some hard-core Chinese place in Soho…you can just take her everywhere and she loves it. My life has been in London for ten years. I suppose I create more of a connection with people from my past who are as comfortable as I am in the place where I am now. Probably means that I feel more they are more connected to my present.

Hosting and tourism are key modes through which connection is defined as ethical and imagination brokers are constituted. It is not simply a moral matter of making a visit but one must also orient the self to connect. While Cinzia might not have migrated, their relationship continues to develop through efforts to connect imaginations and continued ability to co-constitute common outlooks that blurs stayer and leaver, migrant and tourist. Moreover in planning and performing visits, hosting incites a distancing from daily lives, making hosts semi-autonomous tourist agencies (Humbracht, 2016) that occur at multiple points across trans-local networks. Paola’s account parallels in some ways the interview with Cinzia, when she also described the importance of hosting friends in her City:

I feel like I’m the one who stayed and am that reference point in (city in southern Italy), so I have a sense of (city in southern Italy) continuity that they’ve interrupted. So when they’re here, I want to show them the (city in southern Italy) of today… As soon as someone is here I find the time to dedicate to them.

Cinzia is reflecting on her position, and thus reflects the subjectification of stayer, but it is not simply that, as she is always mobilized. She went on to explain that a key part of hosting for her is putting on dinner for friends who have moved abroad, and local friends, just after
Christmas, that she linked to a blurring of friends and family: “true friends for me are family, the party on the 29th is a party with my other family.” Thus, hosting and connecting imaginations is a crucial mode, through which self-development becomes a joint project – and an important expression of agency in constructing trans-local selves, blurring lines of familiar/strange, friend/family.

In addition, blurring the exotic and mundane is not reserved for migration contexts. Expressions of care for the self, by transforming the self into an imagination broker, are performed during return visits as much as visits to migration contexts through acts of displaying change. Andrea, for instance, described that return visits like visits to London are, in part, opportunities to develop his independence. He discussed a moment with his mother as an example:

*Andrea:* Last time I went (to Italy) I cooked risotto. It was one of the first times I violated the kitchen, it’s been my mom’s kingdom.

*Interviewer:* Why did you want to do that?

*Andrea:* I mean, I think it’s one aspect of the bigger independence thing, and making your son, do things by himself. Since I lived there, my mother used to always cook and never tried to make me do anything. So when you move and live by yourself and you learn things you are also maybe happy to do the same things at home.

Developing the self through migration is not simply a form of escapism but actualization. Migrants, and friends and family, use contextual ambiguity of a return visits and guesting to actualize identities, which connects and re-deploys imaginations of self through self-other relations. Demonstrating the change, allows Andrea’s mothers to co-construct an imagination of his shifting identity.

In addition, routes are by no means bi-directional. Instead, hosting happens at multiple points, encompassing emigration points and several international and domestic migration contexts. What appears to be important for the growth of relationships, is not dichotomies of stayers or leavers, tourist or migrant, but the ability to connect imaginations. Paola’s close friend Anna, who migrated to Germany around the same time as Paola explained that they are different,
as Paola is more a career woman while Anna is a dreamer. This is something she felt was reflected in their different migration destinations. They chose different migration paths, though they have continued to stay in touch, regularly arranging visits in Germany, London and their home town in Italy. Despite different paths, Anna insisted that what is important, is to be able imagine their migrant lives together: ”Well now if I walk around Berlin in the places we went. Those are our places. Even now, I smile, because I think about it, and she’s here, she belongs to (City in Germany).” Thus, situating others fosters imaginings of relations that blur the familiar and exotic.

Another crucial means of constituting self through self-other relations is digital hosting. While hosting in physical locations is important for locating selves and others, stabilizing identities through digital practices, is equally as important. In regard to the digital, imagination brokers generally engaged in a high frequency of ICT contact, had intimate familiarity with the daily life of others, used of a multitude of digital platforms, and acted as a primary contact point between members of social networks who distribute knowledge of selves and others and/or a high level of adaptation to others by trying to integrate ICTs into daily life. This confirms Madianou and Miller’s (2011) finding that relationships that develop significantly, tend to integrate multiple forms of media.

Using technology like WhatsApp to interpret and translate others into space is a common means of creating imagined and affective co-presence. Both migrants and non-migrants described that a regular part of daily life entailed visually transcribing loved ones into daily surroundings and activities. Chiara described this with her best friend Marta:

Marta is passionate about art history and museums. There was an exhibition at the British museum on Greece, I took a picture, sent it, and said that “I would like you to be here, to go together.”

Migrant and non-migrant selves are actualized in time and space by coding loved ones into local surrounding that fosters an implicit duty for continued connection across multiples spaces of daily life.

Furthermore, while hosting entails interpreting and co-constituting others, the role of the broker also involved distributing knowledge of others through networks. Brokers both relay
information about others and stimulate connections related to daily life. Lucia, for instance, a London based friend of Cadence, described a friend in Rome, Patrizia, who is part of the same friends network and she explained how much of the networks contact and information is organized by Patrizia. As an example she spoke of how Patrizia keeps friends up-to-date and compels contact between friends:

Patrizia told me that Lorenza was having a problem that her son has this allergy, and she’s really worried about it. So I called Lorenza immediately and asked ‘how are you, is everything okay?’, without saying that Patrizia had told me, you know, to let her feel my presence.

Circulating information and incurring contact between relationships acts to situate informants as key reference points in trans-local personal communities. In addition, it demonstrates an important means, through which certain relationships contribute to actively developing self-other relations after initial migration moments for reinforcing felt connections.

7.3.4 Connecting the New to the Old, Interrogating the Old with the New

In addition to utilizing practices of keeping in touch to re-construct imaginations of self with previously established relationships, migrants also utilize return visits to re-make selves and others with newly created relationships. An ethics of connection can act to foster imaginations of wholeness by bridging gaps between new and old. Return visits become a way to link new relationships to personal histories of place and old relationships. Visits actualize selves by helping to moor relations in the present. This process occurs with friends as well as family. Several informants discussed the importance of bringing new friends back to Italy. Cadence for example, described a trip to her home city with a new friend, Alba, she met at work. A friend she said who was the first “important new friend” since moving abroad. The trip was designed as a means to develop new levels of intimacy:

I invited her to (Italian city) to open ourselves and talk about things. Me and her only. And to show her what my life is, where I’m from, who I am. Because for me, I don’t have superficial friendships. I have a few, and good. For me (the friend), she knows things now. She knows things that the girls (best friends) know. For me she is part of the group. I need them to know me, really, because I believe that real friendship is when you
really know that person. The bad things and the good things. So now, maybe she’s gonna move to Denmark. It’s fine. We’ll see each other every five years, but the friendship is there.

Important to note here is that bringing friends on return visits, is about actualizing selves within relationships in the present, by connecting friends to images of past selves, as a strategy for managing relationships considering potential mobility in the future. Cadence and her friend spent time not discovering selves, but thickening sociality (Obrador, 2012) by re-imagining notions of self, together through leisure practices that construct imaginations and affective faith in solid intimacy. They compared experiences with friends and family, work experiences, problems with children while enjoying the beach, eating at sea food restaurants and sitting by the pool. These practices create embodied and imagined connections between material environments and Cadence’s personal biography, while spurring an affective shift in Cadence’s personal community.

The theme of reciprocity in co-imagining selves is pertinent in romantic relationships as well. Jack, Paola’s German-Scottish husband, described his first trip to Italy with Paola before they married as being about “the origin stories, they’re important, you have to know where someone comes from. I talk about my background, she talks about her background and fond memories, and she actually then came to Germany”. Berlant (2011) has suggested that carving out relations of reciprocity is crucial for fostering fantasy. The ethic of connecting imaginations underpins the reciprocity for return visits and co-construct fantasies of wholeness. Visits do not appear to be a means to discover past selves with new relations, but more as an avenue to co-produce knowledge of self in order to develop new relationships, or as Jack explained, the trip more than anything “played a role in us, you know, in us kind of forming a stable relationship”. Thus, visits are important in creating common imaginations of selves in order to stabilize relationships, migrant trajectories.

It is through this reciprocity that informants can orient and recognize the self towards others by problematizing and connecting themselves to personal histories. Jack linked visits to personal aspirations of finding a partner that avoided normative ideals in marriage and the life course within the UK: “I never wanted the professional partner, you know, ‘yes, we shall be getting married, we shall buy a house and we shall have children’…I like going to a place where
things are not just the same”. In stabilizing their relationship, Jack explained that while he did indeed want a house and children, visits were a means of confirming his desire for something outside of life course norms, while confirming an image of Paola as reflexive, yet linked to an element of the exotic:

Paola’s not very Italian. She’s in some ways, she’s not in others. She loves trying new things, whereas in Italy…they kind of stick to what they know. She went against the grain. I think it will be good to get a mortgage, but she was like ‘I’m going to make up my mind about this’. So, on the holiday, I was like ‘fuck me, I’m here with a beautiful woman, whose showing me around, you’ve been on the beach, then you shuffle off for a coffee, then she gets changed and suddenly emerges with an evening dress, looking glamorous, and what you’re gonna do is go for an ice cream and a meal’. And you feel like a million dollars.

For several informants, especially those who have developed important relationships in London, constructing a sense of wholeness entails utilizing return tourism to define relationship ethics in concert with an overlying precept of connection. Not only do they define reflexivity as an ethical way of being internal to the couple during visits, they also reinforce a sense of responsibility to each other to continually connect imaginations that reinforces the fantasy of wholeness over time. Thus, an ethics of connection is linked to sustaining rhythms of visits.

7.4 Imagination Brokers and Eurhythmic Intimacy as Embodied Wholeness

A primary avenue defining transformations of imagination brokers and linking life course trajectories, is through connecting the rhythms of everyday life to those of keeping in touch. As migration provokes problematizations of intimacy, informants are compelled to think of and monitor intimacy in terms of generating rhythms of digital and physical co-presence. Contact that includes rhythms of varying digital platforms and rhythms of physical contact that potentially coincides with leisure/tourism rhythms. The virtual and physical mobilities of relationships overlap and relationally construct each other as ethically virtuous, and other banal rhythms such as commuting, shopping, leisure and holiday rhythms. This section aims to demonstrate how some relationships develop what Lefebvre (2004) has termed eurhythmic mobility, a union of rhythms that defines what is good or normal, where juxtaposed rhythms become routine, habit or repeated invariably (Marcu, 2017). Furthermore, as rhythms are
produced and known at the level of the body and in relation to other rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004), the syncing of rhythms contributes to sustaining fantasies for solid intimacy. Some relationships develop a mobile taken-for-grantedness (Fallov et al., 2013) that constructs affective and imagined trans-local belonging as wholeness.

Importantly, in the VFR literature, some have argued that keeping in touch consists of contrasting experiences of home and away in relation to place, privacy and sociability (Ashtar et al., 2016; Shani & Uriely, 2010). This point seems to ignore the importance of questioning familiarity for whom, and according to what rhythms over time. This section, in combination with the following chapter, demonstrates that familiarity is distributed differently across personal communities. For many, while there may be experiences of the exotic, some informants become so integrated into the lives of others that dichotomies of home and away make little analytical sense. This section instead reveals how dichotomies of disruption and development can dissipate or at least go mostly unnoticed.

7.4.1 Blurring ICT Platforms

In regard to ICTs, syncing daily routines for many migrant informants became a clear means and measure for developing self and the intimacy of self-other relations. Lefebvre (2004) argues that intervention through rhythm has the objective to strengthen or re-establish eurhythmia and the union of rhythms. For several informants, commuting times were key moments to develop contact. Cadence, for instance, drew a clear line between people who she normally has contact with during commutes and those who she does not, insisting “I have forty minutes on the over ground in the evening and in the morning. This is the time I have. So, if you’re not on the tube or not free it’s very difficult to contact me”. Regarding her sister Marg, Cadence spoke about how strong their relationship had become through her sisters effort to create shared commuting routines for co-developing imaginations of the life course and not simply as time for updates:

I take the over ground. We talk everyday, and I will say ‘yesterday I did this’, or ‘you know I’m worried (my daughter) is gaining too much weight, what do you think’? ‘Oh, I think, so lets see, oh well you should’...We start like this. And then maybe, well funny things, I start talking about a girl who is completely drunk on the train and I say ‘this is incredible, you have drunk girls on the train in the UK with a miniskirt, its super
dangerous’. We talk about everything that I see around me. Then work, advice on difficulties with my husband, with relationships, advice with my kids.

Routinization of commuting fosters embodied familiarity with and degrees’ of sovereignty over space (Corvellec & O’Dell, 2012). Thus, co-developing commuting routines is about more than imagination, but co-constructing embodied knowledge of space.

Syncing routines, though, is not simply a matter of the temporal and spatial fixing of inter-connected practices. Of course, frequencies of ICT contact, combinations of technologies within relationships and in relation to preferences/anxieties regarding ICT’s varied significantly between relationships. In addition, rhythms are no doubt a realm of control (Cresswell, 2010) in which norms and ICT affordances oscillate to form the temporal and spatial rhythms of sociality. Several informants, for instance, reported rhythms of obligation, like speaking to their mother in a mostly stable pattern, always directly with Skype or on the phone (as opposed to less intrusive ICTs platforms like email or text), because they felt “it’s better to keep her calm”. Yet, repetition and stability do not necessarily equate to either control or intimacy. Relationships that appeared to develop demonstrated a commitment to the negotiation and balancing of multiple ICT’s practices and daily life: a kind of stable flexibility, where the often significant work of on-going flexibility became taken for granted.

The fantasy of wholeness is generated in part from, and indeed can derive its power from, the extent to which practices of keeping in touch and the organizational efforts that underpin them become taken for granted. As the work to sustain routines goes increasingly unnoticed, routines can become more a matter of faith in stability, rather than actual stable repetition (Ehn & Lofgren, 2010). This is the ground on which eurythmia is akin to fantasy for solid bonds. In contrast to other relationships (described in the next chapter), the use of technology, like Skype or phones calls, loses their event-like qualities, of being something outside of daily life that has to be coordinated. In addition, intimacy takes on more of a spontaneous quality, where instead of hurried moments of catching up, time unfolds with little notice. Serena described as much in relation to evening Skype conversations with her mother in the evening, “So, maybe when I’m cooking or just starting to have dinner, I just call them, because my laptop is always on”. She then goes on to describe conversations as about “minor things, because being in touch all the time, we don’t really have big or important things to say to each other. It’s just to say I bought
another pair of shoes, or is it raining today’. Co-presence with distant others can become about the unremarkable hum of daily rhythms that contributes to the de-exotification (Larsen, 2008; Larsen et al., 2006b) of those distant others.

De-exotification works through embodied repetition, or what Lefebvre (2004) has called ‘dressage’ that also parallels Foucault’s (2003) notion of discipline. A crucial part of eurhythmia is how repetition produces the ethical leveraging of ICTs that helps to constitute certain life course moments. Informants described often complex constellations of ICTs that are constituted relationally in order to forge intimacy. For instance, a common description in interviews is using Facebook to construct general aesthetics of daily life that communicates to less intimate others along networks, but that, however, stimulates an ethics for other platforms. For instance, Paola’s close friend Marco, who lives in a city in Central Italy, described that digital contact with Paola produced a dynamic between Facebook and WhatsApp - posts on Facebook that are intended to create a general image or even deception would require clarification via a WhatsApp’s group consisting of himself, Paola and Anna. Or perhaps something important would be sent through WhatsApp before Facebook, in order to facilitate more intimate discussions before posting something. He discussed an example with Paola’s son:

Facebook is for everyone, WhatsApp is Facebook but with subtitles that says ‘in reality, it’s like this.’…the day (Paola’s son) learned to ride a bike, she sent us a video. Then she put it in on Facebook, but first to us. On Facebook people liked it, put little hearts, in private we were like ‘wow, I learned to bike at 10!’ and she said, ‘that explains a lot’, we were joking. With Facebook, you wouldn’t do that because everyone would read the stupid jokes.

Thus, imagination brokers steer intimacy between ICTs in that others are expected to relay important information using the proper channels, and a wider audience. Life course moments are shared and constructed through the normalized, flexible, relational repetition that constitutes the ethical dimension of various platforms. Affect, though, is also heavily intertwined here. The flexible sliding between affordances of ICTs is often the taken for granted work of felt and sensed co-presence. Cadence, for example, described her daily digital communication with Alba as that some of friends and family abroad alternate between calls and WhatsApp (for those abroad, she uses Skype on her phone). A crucial part of daily communication that also confirms
the importance of their relationship, is the ability to sense the other and act accordingly. She described an example from a morning text:

She wrote me ‘I have decided to arrive late to work’. But the way she wrote it I immediately felt that there was a reason, then she sent me ‘all’s fine, I’ll call in a bit’. So, I just stop and then I call her, because I understood that she was really pissed off or sad’.

Individual ICT affordances are exploited through the ethical and affective economies of care that give form to sociality. Informants negotiate juxtaposed rhythms of daily life and co-presence by feeling and thinking ethical means of conduct. In addition, in part, it is the on-going negotiation and embodied performance of togetherness through ICTs that enables informants to feel connected, gaining a sense of reality in relation to others and their relationships. Marco discussed as much when he described a difficult moment for Paola:

There was a moment when she was pregnant, in which I prayed for her a lot, like I had never done even when we were young, because I was worried. I knew it was a difficult moment. Instead of talking with the normal regularity, she got in touch just with a “how are you?”; but in a difficult moment, an extra phone call or message means a lot, because it comes from somebody special.

What links shared fantasy and time in a historic sense, is the manner in which bodies continuously judge their environments and respond to atmospheres, in which they find themselves (Berlant, 2011). While there maybe a religious act, connectedness here is a matter of hope as secular faith, solid intimacy, produced through co-embodied performance at a distance. Marco’s quote points to the power of embodied performance in perceiving others, or better, feeling connected, and the parallel ability to feel the potential for solid bonds – and thus giving fantasy its ontological weight.

In addition, rhythms of ICTs shape a shared sense of intimacy and reality, which in turn further elaborates an ethics of connection, surrounding physical and digital intimacy. A key indication within the fieldwork where relationships were developing, was a shift in relatively negative or sceptical perceptions of ICTs and digital intimacy to more positive connotations. During an interview with Serena’s family, her mother Margherita described how her perceptions of ICTs and daily life had changed since regularly using digital communication with Serena:
**Margherita:** Before, I didn’t even know almost what email is, but then there was this need that came to me to use these instruments. And I realized they have a lot value. Yes, I had to learn a lot of things. And if I didn’t have a daughter in the UK I would have never learned these things.

**Tomaso** (father): And now you use the Internet regularly.

**Margherita:** Yes, yes, it’s true. Now I go online and search for things. It makes you enthusiastic, once you understand that you can do it, there are a lot of interesting things that you can see, and I can say that I like it now. For what I can do, I learned to use the basics. And now that Silvia (Serena’s sister) is pregnant, I’ll go online, look at the shops and maybe compare things between the shops.

Lefebvre (2004) argues that entering into a society or group happens through repetition, fostering acceptance to its values by bending oneself to its ways. Here, this thesis argues that instead of bending to outside forces, ethics and values are engendered from below through co-performances of ICTs and daily rhythms. While most informants discussed anxieties about ICTs, several also discussed how through the development of daily rhythms of digital co-presence they had begun to value the form of intimacy generated by and linked to ICTs. When asked if her relationship with Serena had changed Margherita expressed that “we hear each other more now”, going on to say that:

Probably we know more about her (Serena) life than before. Before she wouldn’t talk to us about a spider in the house or the heating problems. She would tell us things, but not in detail. Now, she tells us everything in a lot detail. We are participating more in her life than before. Makes us closer.

Perceptions of intimacy and familiarity with others are generated from the flexible repetition of contact, stemming from a common ethics of commitment and felt presence. ICTs expand capacities to connect, contributing to the development of the life course that re-orders daily life, and a sense of belonging around common ethics of intimacy and connectedness.
7.4.2 Syncing Physical Travel, Tourism and Leisure Rhythms

Physical co-presence and proximity, though, is a valued mode of intimacy for distant relations and no doubt here to stay (Larsen et al., 2008). In conceptualizing visits and eurhythmia, the focus is not on quantitative frequency or directional frequency within travel routes. Important to note, though, is that in these relationships, while the numerical balance could be tipped in one direction or the other, it remained important that visits were regularly occurring in both directions. The result is that visits can lose their liminal or event-like qualities, particularly in the manner in which syncing of holiday/leisure rhythms can blur the extraordinary/familiar binary and can also be related to how physical intimacy becomes linked to digital intimacy.

An important aspect of eurhythmia is the combination of holiday, business, or leisure and tourism rhythms with visits that may also involve care practices. Though the minority of the sample, several relationships described how both parties had altered normal travel rhythms in order to enable regular visits. This entailed visits in two or three directions between origin destinations/migration contexts or involving multiple migration points. As a general indication, visits in each direction for these relationships were mostly concentrated in Paola and Serena’s personal communities, varying from once per year to once every three months. The key point, though, is that part of the ethics of connection is a commitment to sync yearly rhythms of holiday and leisure with those of family and friends abroad. Paola’s brother Ricardo described this by saying:

She (Paola) organizes all her trips, or holidays, so that we can be with the kids, her and Jack. But even more, since the kids are here, and we organize all our holidays to be with them.

In contrast to relationships described in the next chapter, some informants described regularly combining holiday trips with visits, instead of pursuing individual tourism ambitions. Or some described splitting holiday time in two, to allow a yearly albeit shorter trip for tourism and a visit that also included leisure time. However, informants also described combining holidays with family with some days together and others in separation. In regard to kinship, Miller argues (1998) that love and affinity are constructed through consumption as sacrifice. The combination of consumption and sacrifice in the sample is a key aspect of the relational ethics,
through which intimacy is developed for both kin and kith. Crucially, though, it is not simply in the choice to sync potentially contrasting rhythms, but how the repetition of the sacrifice underpins, that commitment configures identities, belonging and intimacy. Speaking with Paola and then her mother Flavia, for instance, they described that over the years, visits always contained elements of tourism and sacrifice, such as visiting tourist sites in the UK and Flavia's unsolicited insistence on cleaning Paola and Jack’s house because “I have to feel useful.” It was, however, after the birth of the children and resulting rhythmic mobility that a sense of embeddedness was produced.

Well, she’d come once a year, maybe, and now quite often. She knows (London borough) very well. She would be kind of a bit shy about flying…now we don’t have to pick her up from anywhere. She knows exactly what she’s doing. She can take the children, she knows people in (London Borough) who come to say hello. She has her favourite café, where she goes to have brunch. She’s completely integrated as well. She goes to Boots, buy certain stuff. She’s got a drawer here with her own stuff.

Paola and Flavia, though, described that visits still entail some site seeing, or special events in London with the children. Thus, the relational development of care and consumption practices can be read as a form of sacrifice, as Flavia does not simply relax as on a leisure trip. In addition, however, Paola and Flavia have a parallel form of intimacy on return visits, where they combine leisure/tourism activities with childcare. The relational construction of holiday making and every family practice can be a means to perfect family practice (Hall & Holdsworth, 2016). Thus, care practices and consumption practices are honed in relation to each other, allowing them to continually migrate between London and Italy. This involves making the home into a holiday space and holiday space into a home that distributes this relationality across trans-local space.

7.4.3 Blurring of the Physical and Digital

The blurring of the familiar/strange is intimately linked to the blurring of virtual and physical rhythms of co-presence. The intimacy linked to virtual and physical rhythms are mutually co-productive and can entail a process of de-differentiation. In the first instance, virtual rhythms often lead to visits that also mirrors the flexibility demonstrated in digital practices. For example, Fabio, a business manager who has lived in the UK for four years, explained in an
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interview that his regular calls with a group of four friends from high school (three of which live abroad in Europe) could lead to visits. As an example he mentioned how a trip to meet in one friend’s migration city in Switzerland came about:

usually we have big group Skype calls together. So, for example we were doing just a group Skype conversation and at some point someone said ‘why don’t we meet somewhere’ and then it quickly escalated to booking flights to Switzerland.

Being at home in practices, or what Clifford termed (Clifford, 1997) dwelling-in-practice, with both digital and physical practices enables potentially contrasting rhythms to coalesce and adds to the sense that relationships have continued uninterrupted.

In addition, the ethics of connection points informants to use visits to improve familiarity for digital co-presence and also to use ICTs to generate familiarity for visits. It is through the merging of ICTs and visits that relationships can gain importance and indeed heightened intimacy, where perceptions of relationships can slide between forms of co-presence. Many informants described that what made some key relationships important, was an uninterrupted nature of relationships - catching up is not necessary, as informants pass from ICTs to visits and thus, the dialogue continues uninterrupted. Ambra, from northern Italy, who has lived in London for two years, described how digital and physical intimacies are connected:

the more you are in touch with people through technology, the more it makes it pleasant to visit people when I go home…The constant keeping in touch through the technology makes the relationship possible when you go home. I mean, um, it's much easier to come back after four months in Italy to a person that knows you don't like you’re job or your very happy about (child) speaking and when you see each other you can keep talking about that and not just make a summary of the last four months to keep them updated…You feel closer, like, um, eh as if you were just there, and uh, and they know more about you, and it doesn't feel like you have been far away for such a long time.

Fantasy for solid relations operates in part by enabling a feeling of temporal and spatial continuity between digital and physical encounters. Digital rhythms can slide into and constitute intimacy during visits and equally the intimacy generated during visits can telescope back into digital co-presence. Cadence's friend Lucia, who lives in London, described how her and her
three-year-old daughter’s daily Skype calls to grandma were created from her mother’s visits to London from her mother:

So, now it’s become a ritual in the morning that we put the computer here and she (the child) says, ‘bring grandma here’. Its because my mom comes here, and sleeps on the couch. The living room is her room, and we played here and she (the child) would come here wake her up. So, she (the child) doesn’t want to talk in her bedroom, but here, and she shows her drawings, and they play games that you can play via Skype, and they talk for an hour.

The intimacy experienced in relationships follows inter-articulating pathways of digital and physical co-presence. In addition, fantasy and ethics also played a key role in this blurring and thus, how relationships are negotiated. Marg, for instance, explicitly linked aspirations to “create a solid family around my kids” to connecting physical and digital practices. She explained that her daily routines of ICTs are in part created as a means to help enable potential future visits to her family for her children. Thus, the ethics of connection re-imagines potential futures of togetherness:

I cannot leave my kids with someone for 10 days that (the daughter), she doesn’t recognize. Skype allows you to recognize her grandma. So (the daughter) has seen grandma maybe five times, an average of 2 or 3 times a year. Um, I think with kids, the further away you are, its more about, a quantity than quality, with the relationship, the more you see your grandchildren (with Skype), the more they’re gonna be familiar with you, the more they wanna be with you, and the more they’re likely to appreciate staying with you.

Importantly, fantasy here is no doubt linked to politics as an engineering circuits of affect (N. Thrift, 2004). Constructing rhythms, though, is not only about affect. Fantasy is part of care for the self, and self-transformation through self-other relations. By merging physical and virtual practices, Marg hopes to create the familiarity and responsibility necessary to enable a much needed couples holiday: “ideally I’d like them to get acquainted, so that one day, it’s for our benefit, as a couple. We’d love to leave our kids…so, we can have a long trip.” Thus, the ethics
of connection ties together migrant self, couple and grandmother through leveraging the digital and physical.

As with the blurring of individual digital affordances, the inter-articulations of the digital and physical contribute to faith in that intimacy at a distance is authentic and aides in fostering common values of intimacy. Marg went on to say that:

It’s creating a real relationship…I know that she (the daughter) knows who she (the grandmother) is, she’s not a stranger. So, although Skype is not the best because you know you don’t physically touch them, they laugh, they talk, they see each other. And I feel, that (the daughter) knows who her grandma is, and her other grandma as well because there is Skype. I don’t feel bad about leaving her.

Through rhythmic repetition fantasy is bolstered as intimacy and relationships are deemed authentic. Moreover, the relationships that are practiced on-line, act to cultivate relations offline that link virtual and physical spaces through felt presence. Marg and Cadence’s mother for instance, compared her relationships with her three daughters, two of which are mostly enacted digitally and with the third that lives locally (Alice). She insisted that the means of contact is not important, i.e. whether with email, the phone, Skype or face-to-face contact. She is always able to understand her daughters. Here she spoke about Skype and Marg:

I think through the tone of the voice, the vocabulary, we can understand what mood we’re in, for the three girls. I can understand immediately if I’m bothering her, or if she’s available; from her face, its closed or she’ll take the baby and say ‘say hi to grandma’ and not (repeats phrase in more jovial tone). The tone is really different. And then I say okay, let’s talk to tomorrow.

She then described an example from a meeting with her daughter who lives locally:

I saw Alice today for two minutes. I was worried about her job, and a deadline. I asked her, she said, “yes yes, work is fine, the deadline is fine,” I understood immediately that she was hiding something. And she knows I understood. We just pretend otherwise, but in two words I understood she was lying.
A key indication of eurhythmia is the manner in which the ethics of connection configures values of physical and digital intimacies. Thus, common values act as ontological coordinates that inform a shared sense of belonging and identity within personal communities. In this way, shared values are also constructed by and construct shared fantasies, or common felt potential for solid bonds despite changes in selves and relationship dynamics.

7.5 Conclusion

Despite employment difficulties, informants explained their migration through narratives of change and self-development. Indeed, migration is a mode for re-making the self and the life course. Re-making the self, though, always involves experiencing the self through relations with others. Thus, this process inevitably concerns politics and re-constituting ethical dimensions of self-other relations. Migrants hope to develop the self through a number of avenues involving migration, a key area of which is important relationships, such as developing friendships that might foster a more open worldview, improving the self through romantic relationships or creating a better material context for children. Migrants also aspire to exploit migration to re-construct previous relationships. Migration is therefore not a form of individualization, where the crafting self entails the destruction of sociality. Instead migration is a means of problematizing biographies and the relationships in which they are situated, in order to re-make the self by re-imagining self-other relations. Migrants utilize keeping in touch to arrive at a multiplicity of key relationships (Foucault, 1994) in which ethical subjects, and attached meanings of identity and belonging, can be developed through the encounters within those relationships.

What develops, is a fantasy of wholeness: A shared affective optimism or felt potential for solid forms of intimacy that spurs an ethics of connection to relationships and sense of agency to use ICTs and visits to re-imagine new possibilities for self-other relations. This happens by co-developing life projects (Smart, 2007) of personal development, ultimately aligning life course trajectories and daily rhythms through common imaginations, a common sense of felt presence of selves and others, and common values and a sense of belonging. Practices of keeping in touch foster a sense of felt continuity in relationships that feeds fantasies of intimacy attached to imaginations of the good life promised by capitalist culture. Fantasies act as engines of problematization of selves and the intimacy attached to relationships. Intimacy itself is made into an object of thought that compels informants to think of relationships and
selves embedded in relationships, through a lens of the digital and physical. Some informants abroad commit to connecting selves and life course moments by turning themselves into imagination brokers in order to link imaginations and foster greater intimacy. Informants, though, are not driven by nostalgia for past relationships. Instead, some relationships become key reference points in the constitution of life course moments. Informants co-construct imaginations and feelings of self by oscillating between moments of digital and physical hosting and guesting.

Syncing the rhythms of daily life is also key to developing the intimacy required to co-develop life course moments. Problematizing relationships in terms of physical and digital co-presence, involves thinking about overlapping rhythms of physical and digital contact and those of other daily mobilities like commuting and tourism mobilities. The physical and digital do not construct relations, but are deployed along with other daily mobilities in order to co-construct knowledge of selves and others that fosters greater intimacy. For some, these mobilities become eurhythmic (Lefebvre, 2004) or a union of rhythms in a state of good health or normalness, where rhythms become routine and habit. Through embodied repetitions intimacies connected to differences between practices begin to melt together with the familiar/exotic, shaping a form of belonging as shared taken-for-grantedness. Thus, for informants, the virtual and physical, and the moral and market blur as they are exploited in order to give form to self/other relations and the intimacy situated within those relations.
8 Cruel Optimism and Imaginations of Un-belonging

8.1 Introduction

Why do people attempt to re-construct the conditions of solid, proximate, and normative intimacy through practices of co-presence despite obvious and often dramatic changes in lives that render that form of intimacy highly challenging? This question started as an important thread in interviews with migrants in London and became a dominant theme regarding meeting friends and family in Italy. Many informant accounts continually revolved around familiar and immutable experiences of intimacy that sustained a desire to keep in touch, yet, simultaneously involved negative and unfamiliar experiences that lead to partially abstaining from contact. One answer to the question could relate to the contextual ambiguity yet durability of kin (Miller, 2007) and kith structures. Or perhaps the answer lies in an understanding of intimacy as home and away (Uriely, 2010), where experiences of familiar sociability are enough to sustain desire to keep in touch despite experiences of unfamiliarity. However, these conceptualizations ground the answer too closely to tensions of binary logics and ideology that downplay the messy nature of everyday life. In order to theorize informants’ lives, it is crucial that academia attempts to represent the heterogeneous affects and thoughts that make up informant accounts (Moore, 2011). Equally, in attending to affect, it also remains important to avoid flattening human agency and thus, requires attention to the formation of ethical subjects (Long & Moore, 2013a). While the previous chapter intended to make clear how affective fantasy and care for the self can lead to the co-development of intimacy, identity and belonging through the integration of rhythms of daily life, this chapter aims to articulate how dimensions of fantasy and ethics create discord by both enabling and immobilizing co-formations of intimacy, identity and belonging through daily rhythms and keeping in touch.

Therefore, the aim in this chapter is not to demonstrate how relationships are structured around iterations of positive and negative experiences of home and away (Uriely, 2010) within digital and physical encounters that could sustain relationship trajectories through capacities of emotional management (this will be discussed in the next chapter). Affect is not emotion (Berlant, 2011) and thus, home and away cannot be separated. In part, the change informants perceive is mediated by affect pre-thought that constructs away as home and home as away. The aim in applying Lefebvre’s notion of polyrhythmia (Lefebvre, 2004), though, is to reinforce the ethical or cognitive dimension, to show that while affective optimism guides rhythms, informants
think ethically with affect, not in separation, not to manage emotion, but to give form to self in conditions of rapid change for relationships. Hence, while optimism for solid bonds drives all ICT use and visits, informants engage in an evaluative process of intimacy attached to these forms, resulting in disaggregated rhythms that, however, optimism prevents from falling into total arrhythmia, or complete dissolution of contact.

8.2 De-syncing Trajectories and Unbelonging

8.2.3 The Fantasy of Wholeness Turns Cruel

Some relationships examined during the fieldwork entered into a relation of cruel optimism. According to Berlant (2011), a relation of cruel optimism exists when:

(…) something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. These kinds of optimistic relations are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially.

This chapter describes when the fantasy of wholeness turns cruel by impeding further intimacy. Or better, when the desire for durable forms of intimacy attached to relationships, and implicit in practices of keeping in touch, actually begins to disrupt the intimacy and connection informants set out for in the first place by keeping in touch. As described in the previous chapter, the draw of optimistic attachment to relationships, or perhaps shift in intensity, can be related to recent migration or other changes in the life course like having children, unemployment or retirement. Through keeping in touch informants explained a general intensification of contact and general importance of loved ones. This confirms previous findings that migrant mobility can lead to a strengthening of relationships through keeping in touch (Cronin, 2014; Walsh, 2009). Giorgio, Andrea’s best friend, for instance, who is a returning domestic migrant, explained his experience of their friendship before and after Andrea’s migration as, “Time by time I realized, I valued our relationship even more, both the person and the bond we had, that we built”. The affective intensification and re-valorizations of relationships are provoked by the feeling of continuity and felt-presence incurred from keeping in touch, whereas for example, Chiara’s close friend Eugenia, described that when they see each other during return visits “it’s like I saw her last week; we just pick up where we left off”. Thus, intensities of affect (Thrift, 2004) that
Informants experience result from practices that act as performing relays of new emotional histories and geographies, that sustain the optimistic nature of attachment to relationships.

However, as opposed to those described in the previous chapter, intensification and a feeling of continuity in relationships does not necessarily equate to commitment or co-imaginings of personal development. Not all informants actively link processes of problematization and modes of care for the self to certain relationships. This leads to an identity politics, linked to life course trajectories, where relationships are valued, experiencing affective intensification but perceived differences lead to a disconnected sense of self and belonging, and attempts to limit responsibility for contact. As the interview with Eugenia developed, for example, her account became more of an admission of disconnectedness with hopes for the potential to re-connect:

What I miss, is our friendship, in my heart. I mean we grew up as sisters. Now we’re in a period of standby, then it’ll go back to like it was in before. Let’s hope Chiara will come back and we can renew our friendship again. For me, for her, I hope her life is going well there. But I hope she comes back. Her life is there though. You hear each other everyday, but it’s not the same as having them here. You lose a piece of yourself.

Eugenia makes clear that feeling connected does not necessarily equal connectedness. It is, however, the ability to feel connected that contributes to retaining an optimistic orientation towards solid relations, expressed in the hope for return. In Chiara’s second interview, when speaking about a potential return, Chiara thought that while Eugenia and their other close friend Marta remain important, she was unsure of their ability to connect:

If I had to go back to Italy now, I don’t know what kind of relationship I would have with them, for the simple reason that we made different choices with our lives, and we’re different than five or six years ago. Eugenia has kids, she’d have much less time, Marta is about to get married.

Processes of problematization and development of the self through self-other relations are crucial to the constitution of identity and belonging that steer life course trajectories. Despite feeling connected, however, shifts in identity related to different life course trajectories, like migration and having children, become fodder in engendering difference and imagined divergences in self-other relations.
8.2.4 Diverging Modernities, Alternative Belongings and Situating Life Course Others

In detailing cruel optimism, it is important to point out that, as in the last chapter, this relation crosses divides of friendship/kinship, local/non-local, old/new relationships. Thus, one can equally enter into a relation of cruel optimism with a local, best friend as a distant mother and father. Due to limits of space, however, this thesis cannot offer an example of all relationships encountered during the fieldwork. The chapter, though, has aimed to showcase enough variety to represent some breadth of relationships in the sample.

Unbelonging does not equate to a loss of identity and belonging, but the development of a relation in opposition. This relation, though, simultaneously constructs that relationship in optimism by situating its importance. Keeping in touch marks shifts in the construction of selves and others that can serve to highlight how relationships remain familiar despite change. Giorgio, for instance, Andre’s best friend, remarked that during visits home, his understanding of Andrea had changed:

He’s the traveller now, he’s the guy who comes back to his native context of belonging. Everyone asks him to testify, how is it to live there… but you finish this parenthesis and then you always go back to common ground.

Giorgio constructs Andrea as the exotic other, yet, who remains unchanged. In part, there is a sense though that loved ones are unable to imagine trajectories and develop a sense of belonging to those trajectories, to those who have migrated. Giorgio links visits to Andrea’s shift in identity, and an inability to discuss his new life by continually turning to familiar discussions. In change, however, their relationship also gains further value. At the time of the interview, Giorgio himself had just returned from nine years of living in another region of Italy, where he was pursuing writing and rap music. Andrea and Giorgio, in fact, solidified their close relationship in part through Andrea’s continued assistance with Giorgio’s writing, done electronically, and during Andrea’s many visits where he would act as a music producer for Giorgio’s rap music. Giorgio explained that he stopped writing and making rap music, in part because he lost the support of Andrea after his move abroad, and generally realized the importance of their relationship:
I’ll tell you, I stopped doing everything. The total loss of a potential daily reference point … For me it was a huge loss that I’m still living now. The tension and quality of our chats, they seem banal, but I haven’t found them with any other human relationship.

Optimism for solid relations is in part constructed through the heightened importance and quality of their relationship within a context where intimacy is actually perceived to be fading. Thus, the discursive positioning of Andrea as a leaver is part of an identity politics that occurs within a context of rapidly shifting ties that links together ontological shifts related return migration and perceived changes in intimacy. While intimacy is understood to shift the relationship actually gains importance and in parallel to the ability to recognize familiarity in change observed in the assertion that “we always go back to common ground”.

In addition, while many informants had never migrated, they demonstrated their own projects of care for the self that connected them to the global. Alice for instance, Cadence’s sister, migrated to the South Pacific with her father. After three years, she had difficulties with her father and returned to a city in central Italy where she intended to stay: “When I came back to (city in central Italy), I stayed here. I didn’t leave again because I needed to find some stability that I didn’t find until now”. Alice expressed that she is happily married now, does not want to move again and she explained her disappointment that her sisters migrated. She made clear that she cares a great deal for her sisters, and during some difficult moments for her sisters she was upset not to be present. Because of this, and despite her opposition to relationships conducted via ICTs, she explained “I’ve tried to adapt for them”. In pushing further, though, Alice explained that keeping in touch also brought up difficulties related to contrasting identities between her sisters that limited her desire to keep in touch. For Alice, she is very different from her sisters who instead are very similar, “like twins”, and who have been very similar since childhood:

We love each other, but we’re so different in our ways of thinking. I’m really liberal. My kid could say I’m gay or be a hair dresser and I’d be happy, but Cadence is more traditional … Marg is becoming more like Cadence, more sophisticated, like dressing her kids in branded clothes.
Alice described that she is a more alternative person; “sort of a hippie” leading an alternative lifestyle while her sisters are more “serious”. She described that during visits and WhatsApp chats these differences emerge:

Once I told them (on WhatsApp) that for my health I had to follow a vegan diet, because I’m becoming intolerant to gluten and they thought it was just for a trend. I said, even if it was, what’s wrong with that? What if I do it to help animals, it’s not okay? They see it as a bit hippie.

Thus, keeping in touch intensifies longing and in concert with a stayer/leaver within the family. And in addition to how different members of personal communities appropriate divergent global discourses that extend horizons of belonging in order to forge life course trajectories.

The dimension of identity politics was clearly present in situating life course trajectories within romantic relationships. In separate interviews, Serena and her sister Silvia both explained that while the sisters were in daily contact, Silvia had nonetheless not been as close as other members of the family. During an interview with Silvia and her husband Claudio, himself being a domestic migrant, the motivation for the distance emerged in part as related to an intra-couple dynamic positioned in relation to Serena’s migration experience:

Claudio (husband): I think that she spends the whole day as a kind of foreign parenthesis to her life, or trying to stay attached to her old life I think that’s the problem, she never really migrated…I see that, as a migrant, because here I’m a migrant, she sees her situation in London as a kind of parenthesis. She never moved on.

Silvia (Sister): I know Serena well because she’s my sister. And even if he (Claudio) knows her less, he had the same perception I did… For me I want to stimulate her, saying … we’re here if you need us, but you have to live your choice.

Serena and Silvia’s relationship, and the distance created between them, becomes linked to the construction of identity of Silvia and Claudio as a couple and is informed by domestic migration. Foucault (1986) has suggested that the formation of the ethical subject happens in part within the conjugality of a couple. Care for the self can be articulated in the manner in which
relations with a spouse are defined through guidance, training, and education. The wider relation with Serena creates a means to define that intra-couple relation and migration as an ethical form.

A similar process can emerge between couples in London attempting to build relationships between themselves and friends and family abroad. Of the five migrants who are in a romantic relationship, two discussed that keeping in touch has led to difficulties with friends and family. Giulia, Andrea’s partner, for instance described that keeping in touch regularly with Andrea’s parents created problems related to their Catholic worldview. During visits or Skype calls, they would ask questions that bother her, as for instance, during a Skype call “they asked me what I was making Andrea for dinner. Why? Why am I the one making dinner?” Because of such questions she attempts to avoid a close relationship with them, which might invite further unwanted intimacy that relates to plans for children or marriage, something she knows would contrast with their Catholic worldview:

*Giulia*: So, I’m always a bit weary of getting too close to his family because I’m worried of getting to close too the point that they then feel like they can ask that sort of question. I think we have very different ideas on probably pretty much everything.

*Interviewer*: You mean different worldviews?

*Giulia*: Yes, I am vegetarian, I do yoga and I live with a man without being married, I don’t have kids and I moved abroad to get a better job, you know. I’m probably just what he (the father) doesn’t want for his son.

Giulia also mentioned, though, that she thinks Andrea “maybe wants me to have a relationship with his family”, and that “I do feel closer to his mom, I think I’m the only one that really listens to her”. Thus, in one way, the formation of ethical subjects developed through migration and the conjugal couple can be disrupted by potential intimacy with friends and family during visits and ICT practices. In avoiding intimacy, Giulia hopes to avert enabling conditions that might link their current project of self to previous notions of belonging in Italy. The belief in the couple and implicit expectation for relations with extended family and in combination with a felt connection with Andrea’s mom, constructs an implicit desire for further relations, which would untimely manifest in further visits and encounters with Andrea’s parents.
8.3 Togetherness as Intimacies of Polyrhythmic Mobilities

A key means through which unbelonging is articulated and trajectories are imagined in separation, is through attempts to foster rhythms of physical and digital co-presence. Some relationships, most within the sample, develop polyrhythmic digital and physical mobilities. Lefebvre (2004) argues that social relations enter into polyrhythmia when differing rhythms become self-analytical. The analytic operation simultaneously discovers the multiplicity of rhythms and the uniqueness of particular rhythms. Polyrhythmia equates to the multiple rhythms of keeping in touch within relationships that begin to cause reflection and action on rhythms in everyday life. These reflections contribute to situating life course trajectories translocally. Thus, in contrast to the previous chapter, where the exploitation of differing individual digital platforms and physical mobilities can begin to soften and blur intimacies fostering further commitment, here, intimacies attached to different forms of co-presence are articulated in relational contrast, creating a politics of intimacy that legitimizes minimal responsibility. As with the previous chapter, though, informants here may also experience different degrees of stability and flexibility in contact. Disruptions do not, however, become normalized. The constant juggling of different forms of keeping in touch entails displacing, re-thinking, and re-balancing co-presence. Informants experience embodied rhythms differently (Marcu, 2017), contributing to perceptions that life course trajectories and the sense of belonging and identity attached to those trajectories are pointing in different directions. Therefore, polyrhythmia contributes to cruel optimism in that alternating rhythms of digital and physical presence produce felt presence that engenders the on-going aspirational normativity implicit in imaginations of solid intimacy. Yet it is through these juxtaposed rhythms that different forms of intimacy are constantly highlighted, and that actually de-legitimizes the need for intimacy and creates imaginations of dis-connectedness.

8.3.1 Rhythms of Disagreeable ICTs

In order to keep in touch, informants are compelled to re-order daily rhythms connected to the life course that simultaneously provokes ontological interrogation of those rhythms. While these juxtapositions can be a means to develop self-other relations, they can also foster divergences that underscore the level of commitment informants attach to relationships. The measure of divergence and convergence was particularly clear with Cadence’s sisters. While Cadence and Marg connect regularly via Skype and WhatsApp, Alice had more difficulty
establishing regular digital habits with her sisters. Alice described general difficulties, saying “when people move abroad I have some difficulty to stay connected with them as opposed to when they’re in the same city. In the sense that I have less will to seek them out”. Migration provokes problematizations of selves and relationships. However, several informants do not exploit ICTs and physical co-presence as a means to create the conditions in which, in part through rhythms, selves can be developed together with those abroad. Instead, keeping in touch interrogates daily rhythms related to identities situated within life course moments, constructing difference. Alice described how difficulties coordinating routines with her sisters is connected to differing life course moments:

The problem came up these last few years that she (Cadence) has this really difficult schedule, because she’s a doctor, with absurd hours. I have a different schedule. Plus, she has a family life with a kid that imposes specifics, like, I say ‘I can call you now, ah no now I’m feeding (the child)’. Or she writes on Whatsapp, ‘can we talk on Skype at 7:50’, but at 750 I’m still putting on make-up … Already my sisters were more joined to each other, but now both have kids, even more. They send 3,000 photos a day of their kids, for me, that has just a kind of basic interest. Anyway, I like seeing my nieces and nephews, but it’s not my priority in life like it is for them, I’m still at the stage before that, I’m married but I don’t have kids yet.

The antagonistic unity of rhythms can give rise to compromise or disturbance (Marcu, 2017). For many relationships, integrating ICTs equated to disturbance that emphasizes differing life course moments.

An important element of this difficulty involved syncing daily rhythms around multiple platforms. For some, the use of two or more ICT platforms could become part of regular domestic life that affords complex forms of intimacy. In contrast, while most did use at least two platforms, rather strong imbalances emerge in practice. Most imbalances involved the relational construction of messaging ICTs, such as WhatsApp or Viber, versus the use of a video service such as Skype or Face time (although there were examples of the contrary), where the former is perceived as playful, fun, non-invasive, and spontaneous, and the latter as intrusive, formal and awkward. Andrea’s sister Eleanora and brother-in-law Carlo, for instance, both described that using WhatsApp is more light hearted, as they tend to send joking comments or pictures of their
baby, and the app is easier to fit into their schedule. Skype, though, can be difficult to arrange and is often awkward:

*Carlo:* with Whatsapp you can write at any moment of time, its like seeing them, without video. Skype is a commitment, you have to arrange it so everybody’s present…it can feel like you have to pull something out, you might have something to say, if you were at the table, it would be easier. It’s just not the same. You might want to give an opinion about something, but with the computer maybe you don’t dare as much to say something.

For many informants Skype becomes difficult to organize and does not afford the kind of spontaneous intimacy depicted in the last chapter, in which conversations unfold, or you do not “lose time”. Thus, optimism for developing relationships gets centred more around message apps, forcing Skype use to sporadic rhythms most described as “once in and a while”. Importantly, a relational rhyming as such, and an inability to leverage ICT affordances more dynamically, can lead to an atomization of intimacy, increasingly defined by individual platform affordances. The ability to form on-going discourses and engage on particular life course issues, from deciding on a favourite supermarket, buying a house or breastfeeding, is inhibited. Instead, knowledge of self and others is condensed. Alice described as much by saying, “now we have a relationship where we talk about the highlights, main points, not everything in daily life”, or as another person mentioned, “you send stupid things with WhatsApp, and then the important things you summarize”. Importantly, as daily rhythms and ICTs become de-synced and knowledge of selves is boiled down to fit those rhythms and affordances, biographies become siphoned and intransigent narratives to be exchanged and heard but not negotiated. Andrea’s close friends Giorgia and Pietro, who are brother and sister, described this form of intimacy as follows:

Maybe what changes is the way to talk about things. It’s obvious when you share certain elements of daily life, like ‘ah, I saw this person’. Then you start talking about that person, because you see them everyday. Now, if you live separate lives, it’s more telling an account of what you do.

De-synchronization between ICTs and from banal rhythms of daily life, gives those platforms and attached intimacy, an event like quality that interrogates the rhythms of daily life
in the form of condensed updates. This can both foster reflexivity of selves and inhibits a certain taken-for-grantedness.

Crucially, though, this thesis is not arguing that intimacy based on semi-routinized ‘catching up’ is simply an informational form of relatedness, symptomatic of networked socialities (Wittel, 2001) or that there is evidence that social relations are systematically mirroring the technologies used to sustain those relations (Bauman, 2003). Instead, what is at work is a “freeing up of possibilities” (Foucault, 2003), where the ambiguity of relationships compels informants to define intimacy as an object and develop rules of action that become modes of relating to oneself and the elaboration of an ethics in regard to oneself (Moore, 2011). Within personal communities, juxtaposed and embodied rhythms of ICTs (and physical co-presence) further develop problematizations of intimacy, forming the coordinates for an ethical self, where some develop selves through increased commitment and others through the opposite.

In this way, polyrhythmic mobilities also contribute to shifts in intimate subjectivities that come to form optimistic attachments that see this form of intimacy as ethically sound. Giorgia made this clear, when trying to account for how her relationship with Andrea has shifted during sporadic Skype conversations:

So you have to be interested, invested, in the life of that person. I mean you have to have a focus, have a curiosity to an experience of life that’s different. Not everyone has the patience to be there and say, ‘yes yes, how great, you’re in London, but I don’t give a damn because it’s not my life’, I mean, it’s not a part of my daily life. We’re used to gossiping about our circle of friends. That’s what having a common daily life offers, but that bores me to death. Instead, for other people, maybe that’s what drives them, because they like these gossips. Maybe, that’s what changes. You have to be more invested.

In contrast to an ethics of practice that seeks the constant circulation of details embedded in everyday life as seen the in previous chapter, relations of polyrhythmia de-value banalities in favour of narratives that resemble the exotic, contrasting with everyday life. While, again, the familiar is always felt and fuels optimism, subjectification also plays a role in defining the rules for acceptable forms of intimacy that equally act as an ethical sustaining force of cruel optimism. When creating rules, thinkers are neither outside of a situation nor entirely enmeshed within
Desires and Fantasies for Togetherness: Physical and Digital VFR

(Rabinow & Rose, 2003). ICTs do not produce relations; inter-interrogating rhythms feed problematizations of intimacy and sedentary selves where the potential for re-imagining sociality is made possible.

8.3.2 Disaggregating Digital and Physical VFR, and Valuing the Physical

Furthermore, the inability to forge more complex forms of intimacy by integrating multiple platforms into daily rhythms, contributes to framing physical co-presence as the right kind of intimacy. This section argues, therefore, that optimism becomes concentrated significantly, but not only around physical forms of intimacy. Physical co-presence is no doubt important due to face-to-face embodied proximity (Larsen et al., 2008), yet, the relational dynamic between ICTs also plays a significant role in framing the ethical relevance of that proximity. As relationships shift to mostly non-invasive tech with sporadic video calls, informants reported the increasing value of return visits. Informants reported that return visits afford more opportunity to relate in-depth. That is something, messaging apps and e-mail are thought of as lacking. Alice made this point clear:

I miss a real relationship with her (Cadence). She comes once or twice a year. When we see each other, the relationship is alive, it’s real. When we talk during the year, it’s a thread that gets maintained, to not break away completely, but it’s just a thread. When we see each other, that thread disappears and it’s the proper people in front of each other. We don’t talk about the weekend, we talk about serious things, deeper, you know; “tell me really what’s really going on”. But she leaves and I’m sad, because I know it goes back to maintaining that thread.

Relationships gain affective intensity through the physical proximity of return visits, in part, gaining value in relation to difficulties fostering digital intimacy. Instead of blurring together, rhythms of physical and digital co-presence contrast to highlight differences in the intimacy they constitute. Importantly, as seen with Alice, the physical is situated as authentic. In addition, several informants discussed how physical proximity is more spontaneous: “(during visits) it stretches out more naturally, different things come up. With Skype you don’t talk for a while … you have to say certain things in a short time and then its “I have to go”. Repeatedly, several informants equated the authenticity of physical co-presence to the authenticity of relationships, while ICTs “give you the illusion to be in contact”. Thus, despite being in contact,
it was this co-presence that contributes to perceptions that the shift to mostly digital
communication posed a threat to the quality of relationships. Regarding this, Giorgio spoke of
how much he had begun to appreciate Andrea’s once regular visits in relation to their mostly
digital communication now. He argued that their sporadic Google talk chats were outside of his
daily life and they are “forced to have rhythms that aren’t of our relationship”. He contrasted
these rhythms with those of Andrea’s visits to his former domestic migration setting:

I’ve realized now, how important physical proximity is. The comfort to take an hour and
a half trip to visit. It was great. He would come to visit in the mountains, we worked,
made music, and talked, went hiking. It was time that was alive, that we, uh, could share.
It was the unity of being in the same place, at the same table. Without being together in
the same place, the relationship gets diluted.

Perceptions of inauthentic intimacy afforded from ICTs were also often linked to an
inability to read the body that in turn generated notions that migrant lives in London were
unknowable. Alice, for instance, described that while she maybe in regular contact with her
sisters, they do not have regular physical proximity. Thus, she feels that she actually knows very
little about them:

I don’t live their lives. You live a person that lives in the same city, that you see in
person. You can understand if they’re actually well or not, if they’re trying not to show it.
You can see if someone is tired, or lost weight from working too much, if they gained
weight and are not taking care of themselves. It’s part of what happens when you live
close to someone, you see them everyday. You don’t see the same things with a screen or
pictures.

Many other informants confirmed similar ideas, such as “with a message there is no tone
of voice, you can’t understand intentions sometimes…when you’re face to face, you see
expressions. There’s a type of irony that’s possible, you go back to the way to relate to each
other (during visits).” Thus, the link between ICTs and the intimacy of reading the body
attributes value to physical co-presence and constructs optimism for relationships by fostering a
sense of continuity.
8.3.3 De-syncing Tourism and VFR Mobilities

An important area of inquiry into the social relations that underpin transnational relations is the politics of multi-directional VFR flows and they are imbricated with tourism trips (von Koppenfels et al., 2015). Positioning the physical co-presence of return visits as intimate realism, and thus, as the most ethical form of intimacy, should be viewed in parallel to a lack of syncing tourism and leisure rhythms. One of the key means through which divergent trajectories are accentuated, was through contrasting tourism rhythms and those of VFR rhythms. Of course, many informants cited financial difficulties as a main reason for not engaging in visits to London. These accounts, though, were often contrasted with descriptions of diverging consumer identities in the form of tourism practices. Contrary to relationships described in the previous chapter, though, ambitions of care for the self are not directed towards creating relations through the co-produced performances of visits with migrants, but through tourism linked to relationships that do not include migrants.

Alice, for instance, explained the importance of her new husband in creating a lifestyle. She explained that she doesn’t travel with her sisters because they do not share the same interests as her and her husband: “We take a camper every year and go for a trip to Portugal to a festival in the desert, like burning man. This isn’t my sister’s style of trip, for me it definitely is.” For this reason, Alice explained that “the important family is the one we create. The family of our parents and our sisters is a little less important than the new family.” Thus, the ethical development of self, through self-other relations, can be defined through key relationships that may not include migrants. In a similar vein, Eleanora and Carlo explained that while they drop their plans when Andrea comes to visit and are happy to see him, visiting Andrea “would be a tourist trip” linked with their own development as a couple. For them, regular visits were not ideal. Carlo explained that:

I don’t really move around easily. I’m a pretty sedentary person. I learned from Eleonora to take more trips. I’ve done more trips…to see more places, more capital cities. We went to Portugal one year, we did 1000 km like that. We went to all the cities. I learned to travel, but we always go to different places, to use the resources and time to only (Italian city)-London isn’t the best.
Again, while these informants maintain regular contact, digital and physical encounters construct identities that are imagined as de-synced from life course trajectories, areas of problematization and development of the self that occur through alternate self-other relations.

In addition, the primacy of return visits and physical co-presence also relates to fantasy and optimism. Specifically, the element of fantasy is further highlighted, considering that despite forceful descriptions of continuity in relations experienced during return visits, there were also contrasting accounts. In the first instance, because the physical proximity of relationships described here is based mostly on repetitions of return visits with little or no visits to London, perceptions of unbalanced familiarity of biographies emerge during return visits. Chiara described how discussions during return visits can relate to a lack of visits to London:

My life would probably be easier if they came to visit more … We would have more to talk about, more experiences to share… I can talk about my life, but to say they understand it, is another discussion…it’s one thing to experience something, and its another to tell you about it. It’s not the same.

Uni-directional VFR paths can create disconnected and unbalanced imaginations of biographies. Furthermore, disjunctive imaginations contribute to perceptions of temporal and spatial rifts in biographies, attached to key relationships. In discussing difficulties with loved ones knowing her life, Chiara went on to compare her two close friends in Italy with two close friends in London. While she had difficulty discussing a hierarchy, the temporal and spatial division of relationships was clear:

On a daily basis, we (London friends) see each other and we are doing lots of stuff together here in London, but these girls (in Italy) know me better in that they know my history. For this group of friends (London), it’s a question of daily life in this moment, the experiences and reality I have here now. And for them (Italy) it’s another importance, a kind of background. I am a result of them, and I still have them. But in a certain sense, they (London) are more a present, and they (Italy) are a base.

Thus, it is the shifting life course context of migration, shifting sets of relations and uneven rhythms that, in part, contribute to constructing the heightened importance and optimistic attachment to her old friends.
In addition, similar to ICTs, return visits can be difficult to sync with rhythms of daily life that often demarcated the intimacy of visits as external to mundane existence. Difficulties often involved the life course. Children, for instance, can cause a number of disruptions. Whether migrants visiting those with children, or friends and family receiving migrants with children, visits often entailed adapting to the rhythms imposed by parents. Many who are single also complained of having to adapt their normally highly flexible rhythms to previous family routines of eating at fixed times. In addition, friends and family explained they were often forced to form group encounters with others they either do not know or do not normally spend time with, in order to accommodate a migrant’s busy schedule. Giorgio explained that visits are “a moment of aggregation around him (Andrea) more than a two way relationship. There’s less a possibility for that kind of relationship than we had just me and him”. Furthermore, return visits are often only moments, in which groups of old friends re-unite despite the fact that most live locally. Thus, return visits highlight how highly valued group relationships actually lack intimate rhythms of co-presence. Giorgio, for example, described how much he appreciated seeing Andrea’s sister and Carlo, both old friends, during Andrea’s visit. He went on, however, to explain that the visit served to highlight how much relationships had changed, and “if I went to see them alone it would be a courtesy visit”. He explained further that visits highlight the difference between himself and Carlo:

At a certain point you become realistic no? In life, you abandon that aspect of play and gamble in life. Also, in how you explore certain arguments… you don’t have to rack your brains anymore or talk philosophy anymore. At a certain point, Carlo became less curious. He got more practical, less willing to just spin in circles. Without that component, I’d feel like an ameba.

There is a paradoxical understanding of return visits in that return visits highlight the mutability of both individual and group qualities of intimacy. Yet they are simultaneously situated as the most authentic form of intimacy that together shapes relations as optimistic and understands biographies as known and familiar.

Return visits, in combination with usually one ICT platform like WhatsApp, become the primary bastions of hope for solid intimacy. However, it is because, however, conditions of intimacy shift that fantasy for wholeness gains purchase and thus becomes cruel. The repeated
embodied encounters of visits give relationships feelings of familiarity and authenticity that convey solid relations are still possible. Berlant’s discussion of normative intimacy as fantasy is helpful here (2011):

As that fantasy has become more fantasmatic, with less and less relation to how people can live— as the blueprint has faded—its attrition manifests itself in an emerging set of aesthetic conventions that make a claim to affective realism derived from embodied, affective rhythms of survival (pg.11, original emphasis).

Physical return visits and sporadic ICT use become the linchpins for a will to feel, a feeling of normalcy despite altered forms and conditions of intimacy. Thus, while informants aim to maintain or experience the type of intimacy implicit with solid relations, connected to best friends or family by fostering rhythms of digital and physical co-presence, it is through those rhythms that relationships are perceived as moving towards an unbalanced and inauthentic intimacy that privileges uni-directional physical mobility and un-routinized ICT use.

8.4 Optimism and Sustainable Relations

In arguing that some relations within personal communities develop cruel optimism, one might question whether the continuity and discomfort depicted here is any different from what has already been argued as home and away (Uriely, 2010). Furthermore, despite this thesis arguing the contrary, could cruel optimism not be lumped in with a wide body of literature (Bauman, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Wittel, 2001), framing social relations through an optic of gloom and dissolution?

In regard to the former, to argue for a conceptualization of home and away is to suggest that co-presence consists of contradictory elements in interrogation through dialectic, parallel, perhaps iterative processes. It is important to point out, though, that for informants, there is no contradiction. What may appear as contradictory, aligns within lived worlds of informants, struggling to give form to a present and inter-subjective self. Within fantasy for the good life contradictions are resolved (Moore, 2011). Key here is the recognition that affect is not the same as emotion or experience. Before emotion or experience, which that could be interpreted as “away”, the world is mediated and known through affect (Berlant, 2011), that in this case is a sense of intimacy that feels familiar even if the experience is quite different – creating a
sustainable attachment for relationships through rhythms of polyrhythmia. Relations are cruel in that the very pleasures derived from being in a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of that relation, such that a person finds her/himself bound to a situation of potentially profound difficulty that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming (ibid). Thus, people feel comfort and return to intimate rhythms, precisely because home and away cannot be separated.

This can be illustrated well through a few excerpts from the interview with Carlo, Andrea’s brother-in-law (and friend) and his sister Eleanora. First, it is important to demonstrate early in the interview how Carlo linked difficulties of integrating Skype to Andrea’s migration:

Its pretty normal that we always have our little houses, in our communities, with our friends, everyone’s always there. So, it’s difficult to have to think to use this technology to talk to someone in another country. But you need to talk, because you want to know. Its strange, but its just easier to think that person made their decision, and so you repudiate them, and you leave them be where they chose to go. Because if he did it, and you didn’t do it, one of you did something wrong. Or he was more cunning and understood that this is the thing to do, or you were stupid and you didn’t understand the opportunity was good and you should have gone as well.

Carlo clearly constructs his desire for Skype use through Andrea’s mobility and parallel dichotomy of stayer and leaver as means to de-legitimize this form of intimate contact. After describing some of the difficulties with forging rhythms, though, Carlo, like many other informants, often attempted to reconcile their accounts of continuity and change. A common thread that united friends and family, was that relationships went through different moments of affective and physical proximity and distance, absence and presence. Several relationships of kin and kith described having almost no contact for years. Yet the feeling of connection, when in touch, remained the same, which contributed to a belief that absence or change is not dissolution. Carlo for instance, after describing difficulties, went on to explain why his relationship with Andrea remains strong:

After high school, we really lost touch. We didn’t see each other, full stop. But the great thing is, when you see each other again, after years, you just start again, without a feeling of loss, its happened with all my close friends.
Informants know their relationships are durable, because informants sense others, despite shifting conditions of intimacy. Thus, Carlo insisted that while the mode and frequency of contact has changed, they also simultaneously confirm his belief about the kind of intimacy he shares with Andrea:

Okay, in reality, the frequency of contact has changed, yeah, but the quality of the relationship has stayed the same...maybe we don’t see each other in person that often, but we use the technology to be in contact. It lets you do what we would have done if he was here anyway. Like the other day, we were texting in the metro, saying did you do that software upgrade. What’s the pros and cons? The driver is coming out for the new audio disk, lets gets the upgrade’. Like that just out of nowhere, no hi, how are you, how’s your son, how’s life, that kind of classic routine they teach you in school when you don’t see each other for a while. It is still very everyday, and immediate, without conventions, and that’s really great. We get to the core...that’s our frequency. So in a certain sense its pretty unchanged.

Through polyrhythmia intimacy is interrogated, provoking dissatisfaction and reduced commitment, but also provides enough routine that enables co-presence to be sustained and falling into what Lefebvre (2004) termed arrhythmia. While keeping in touch may confirm the existence of relations while simultaneously impeding the kind of solid relations imagined within that existence, this thesis does not wish to argue that informants are without agency. The relationships that are depicted here may not display the kind of agency described in the previous chapter. These relationships do nonetheless possess reflexive agency that defines how people can connect and sustain relationships. Fantasy has history, and is an active means of participation in constituting what we normally discuss as globalization (Moore, 2011). Giorgio, for instance, discussed how he has thought to approach Andrea’s return visits, considering also the histories of losing touch, and visits were shifting their manner of connection:

Its strange, the fact that we all reunite around the one who has become an anomaly. We always need something to get us out of our routine. If not, human relationships become routine. Also, with the possibility to lose them, no? After not seeing each other, you have a double reaction. From one side you say, ‘it been a while since I’ve seen him’. On the
other side, ‘I haven’t seen him for a while, I can go on like this’. There’s little that changes. We didn’t see each other for six months, when he came here. There’s an urgency to see him, you have to create the conditions to stay together. It’s nice.

Informants reflect on changing intimacy and despite dissatisfactions they nonetheless engage in a process of legitimizing those shifts, enabling transformations of intimacy that re-frame copresence for future encounters. Optimism is open-ended, but is not only a matter of affect, but of subjectification and questions of what kind of intimacy should I/we create.

Thus, in regard to cruel optimism and meta-narratives of dissolving social relations, while optimism may develop into a cruel relation that by no means equates to sedentary nostalgia or a form of pessimism. Optimism is not a symptom of error, a perversion, damage, or dark truth: it is instead a scene of negotiated sustenance that makes life bearable as it presents itself ambivalently, unevenly, incoherently (Berlant, 2011). Furthermore a lack of agency is perhaps over-stated by Berlant, as social relations are not simply reducible to affect (Long & Moore, 2013a). Informants are engaged in the re-constitution of what intimacy can be, and that creates the forms of self-discipline to sustain relations. In relation to return visits, while several informants admitted that while even the physical proximity of being together had changed, this new form of intimacy contributed to sustaining relations. Alice described how seeing her family helps their relationships:

With Cadence, we had a great time together. The distance, in a way, makes you realize the important aspects. If you argued, you don’t talk about it. Time is short. You take advantage of the time you have. It’s the same with my father. When I see him, I feel great, because we talk about things from our lives, how they’ve changed. We always make a fresh perspective on the past and the present. It’s like this with everyone...you don’t see them. When you see them again, the time is concentrated, to have a good time together, and be with each other, and in the end it works, even if you argued before you meet.

While all informants abroad may not sync projects of care for the self to migrants, that might help relations re-develop further, the form of intimacy that takes shape is nonetheless important. Informants maintain construct optimism by situating relations as strong, and perhaps
can being stronger in the future, but by developing a form of copresence that both reduces commitment to some forms of intimacy, as to not to impinge trajectories of the self, but also to sustain relationships over the long term. An open-ended optimism re-situates intimacy inter-subjectively, enabling relationships to continue despite difficulties. The combined force of fantasy and an ethics of intimacy that frames change positively, helps relationships to avoid sliding into what Lefebvre (2004) termed the pathological state of arrhythmia.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to shed light on informant accounts that describe the simultaneous continuity and disruption of intimate relations after migration. This chapter has argued that since relations within personal communities should be viewed as entering into relations of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011). Practices of keeping in touch forge sensed presence, a feeling that intimacy and biographies attached to relationships have gone uninterrupted, fuelling optimism for solid intimacy despite altered conditions due to migration. It is, though, through the very practices that enabled the feeling of possibility in the first place that those scenes of attachment and the ability to re-constitute intimacy is rendered problematic.

While informants described that through ICTs and visits, they experience relationships as if they have gone undisrupted, keeping in touch also creates an identity politics that constitutes an awareness and relational ontology of diverging trajectories. Thus, practices also construct divergent horizons of identity and belonging attached to modernity that in turn defines a lack of desire for intimacy attached to certain types of co-presence. This process is further articulated through the rhythms of practices that develop into polyrhythmia (Lefebvre, 2004). These rhythms intensify affective attachment and problematization of selves and self-other relations, making intimacy an object of reflexive thought and potential transformation. Relationships do not redevelop a taken-for-granted quality, as in the previous chapter. Instead, rhythms of practices constantly inflect one another. These inflections heighten both affective attachment and a politics of identity and belonging that lead to perceptions that some ICTs are inauthentic, while return visits are the most authentic means of intimacy. These serve to reduce commitment to both ICTs and potential visits to London. However, in addition to feeling the affective possibility for intimacy, these practices have effects in that informants develop a transformative and relational
ethics that valorise the more sporadic event and exotic narrative oriented intimacy contained in rhythms.
9 Friction in Translocal Socialities: the Production of Hot and Cold Forms of Responsibility

9.1 Introduction

Separately, the previous chapters revealed how personal communities can develop unevenly by highlighting differences in how fantasy and a sense of identity and belonging are distributed differently. In addition, commitment has been unpacked mostly as a theme in the background. Thus, the unevenness of personal communities and commitment have been present, but remained somewhat opaque. The aim of this chapter is to flesh out these two themes in more detail. The central argument is that friction reconfigures and reframes relational understandings of responsibility within personal communities producing particular dynamic matrices of linked lives. Or put another way, friction within personal communities produces heterogeneous and uneven attachments of responsibility for mobilities of keeping in touch, across different forms of relationships that inform intersecting aspects of life course moments like having children and migration. This thesis in part draws from Cresswell (2013), who has linked articulations of continuity and change to the grinding of mobilities against each other, or against relative stillness, which produces heat, and in turn can highlight the power geometries inherent to change. This thesis, however, argues that friction entails the relational production of both hot and cold. Here, the metaphors of hot and cold are mobilized to signify varying degrees of responsibility, as it pertains to mobilities of keeping in touch. The thesis draws on Cresswell’s notion of fluid friction, or two moving surfaces sliding against each other. In this research, fluid friction equates to the production of projects of self, attached to multiple on-going life course trajectories within personal communities that contrast through mobilities of keeping in touch. Importantly, though, it is how these frictions are managed, which produces variations of heat, and thus further mobility, or cold, that slows mobility or produces certain degrees of immobility.

A crucial element of the aim for this chapter, is demonstrating the relational development of commitment and responsibility across a variety of different relationships. This chapter, though, is not focused on explicitly conceptualizing a blurring of kinship and friendship that would seem to suggest an analysis between two forms or relationships. In part, this relates to problematizing the work of some scholars within tourism that have argued that friendship and kinship are separate categories (Backer, 2007; Seaton & Tie, 2015), thus, reinforcing the durability of normative relations. This chapter does not argue, however, for individualization
(Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014) or democratization (Giddens, 1992) of kinship in a teleological sense that leaves almost no room for obligation. By writing off obligation or assuming that obligation relates to continued normative structure in globalization, we gloss over the actual significance relationships take on in relation to individual lives in progress and understanding the conditional, inter-subjective and relational nature of responsibility. Obligation is crucial in relationships, yet, does not necessarily relate to normativity. Instead it can be a part of the inter-subjective development of the self. The cultivation of self involves how informants take on a concern for others and a responsibility to others that is grounded through an emotional relationship and ethics of reciprocal relations (Hanna et al., 2015). Thus, different family members and different friends may all develop obligations for keeping in touch. Those obligations, though, may not relate to moral codes, but are the ‘stuff of ethics’. Or better, they represent the re-imagining of particular dyadic and group relationships that act as a means to cultivate the self through self-other relations forming highly contingent and heterogeneous assemblages.

In addition, the commitment attached to relationships is decidedly contextual. Relationships are made up of histories that contain a variety of different roles, qualities, activities, and meanings that inform the potential for articulating relations in the present. While at times a father-son relationship maybe defined through parental authority, the same relationship may also contain histories of shared hobbies and interests, shared interactions with other friends (of either party) and common roles of emotional support that emerge through shared activities. What determines the expression or re-articulation of different qualities, is contextual. Thus, being a recent adult migrant without children and no employment commitments, may offer fruitful conditions for that father and son to re-employ previous tourism routines and the development of emotional support through continued visits, where parental authority plays little importance. However, it is important to pay attention to the temperature of that commitment, considering the management of frictions with other key relationships, like a mother/spouse, in inhibiting/enabling commitment to visits.

Thus, the chapter has been structured to demonstrate the relational production of different temperatures of responsibility for keeping in touch. The chapter focuses on only a few personal communities and a few key relationships within those personal communities in order to
demonstrate the relational elements of relationships more effectively. Relationships within different personal communities are divided between the sections in order to highlight that relational production. The chapter begins by offering some empirical insight into friction and setting out the role of friction is marking change. The following sections highlight how the management of friction leads to different variations of responsibility as hot and cold.

9.2 Migration, Life Course and Frictions in Time

The aim of this section is to provide background, through some examples, on how different frictions emerge within particular intersections of life course moments between informants within personal communities and that highlight different power dynamics. These dynamics were at work before the fieldwork occurred, framing commitments to co-presence at present.

9.2.1 Frictions and Beginning Migration

Decisions to migrate created frictions that contributed to the development of uneven relations within personal communities. Initial frictions, or lack of friction, can act to re-frame relationship histories and parallel identities that in turn contribute to shaping the relational ethics of conduct for (im)mobilities of keeping in touch. In part, frictions reflected interactions of moral geographies of sedentary and nomadic imaginations (Cresswell, 2006) that cross economic structures with patriarchal systems. Parental control, for instance, could be challenged by migrant mobility. In Andrea’s case, both his parents spoke to him of their disappointment. Andrea’s parents Tina and Lorenzo described the encounter when Andrea told them of his plans to move:

*Tina*: He told me, ‘in February I’m headed up,’ ‘up where Andrea, Andrea where?’, ‘to London’, ‘what do you mean London? But no, but no”, ‘yeah, I’m going’. Like that, that’s how my baby left.

*Interviewer*: So you mean it was a fast decision?

*Tina*: Yes, but, they probably already decided.

*Lorenzo*: Yeah, that too

*Tina*: They’re 30 years old, Lorenzo.
Lorenzo: They didn’t ask our opinion

Tina: But Lorenzo, 31 years old, parents ah, he’s 31 years old, he decides alone.

Lorenzo: If you’re independent, yes.

Tina: No, even if they’re not independent. He means with work. At 31, they make their own decisions. He’s a man by now. But they’re always your babies, even if their 40 or 50.

...

Lorenzo: so we had to accept it, we couldn’t’ do it differently. Anyway, he didn’t have a serious job, so, go and let’s hope.

Migration can produce friction related to a range of issues from affective attachments to adult children, to financial autonomy and parental kin authority. In fact, friction contributed to framing a responsibility for frequent ICT contact and a visit to London, because “I wanted to see that he was okay”. It is important, however, to avoid analysis anchored between poles of the sedentary and the nomadic (Jensen, 2009). Instead, in part, friction can act as a temporal marker that uncovers the power relations of certain temporal and spatial dynamics that play a role in re-situating social relations. In Tsing’s (2005) articulation of friction in globalization, she has argued that informants cannot replicate previous versions of global forms like migration without inserting their own genealogy of commitments and claims. Migration provokes genealogies of rhythms within particular life course moments that contribute to both problematizations of intimacy as absence and presence, and what constitutes acceptable dynamics of absence and presence. Importantly, this produces the ethics that frame relational ontologies of the life course across personal communities. Early in the interview with Lorenzo and Tina, they described their forced retirement during the 2008 economic crisis and how that shifted their relationship. Lorenzo described this, saying “since I lost my job we started arguing even more. When you’re not around (for work) things go well, you don’t see each other much”. Later, when discussing frictions related to Andrea’s decision to move, Lorenzo and Tina also reflected on his previous move out of the house (and Eleanora moving out of the house years before) in the suburbs to the nearby metropolitan area:
Tina: He had been living in (urban area) by himself, but he seemed closer because he came on the weekends. But anyway our life had already changed, so there wasn’t much difference because he went to London.

Lorenzo: We were already used to arguing more. You could feel the space, then there was another room where you could hide.

Tina: (laughs) Eleanora asked me “what are you doing in that house that’s so big, sell it.” I said, “are you joking? No, one in one room and the other in the other room, its fine.” No, no, no, two rooms aren’t enough, we want space, so lets say that there wasn’t much difference when Andrea went to London. It didn’t change much.

Legitimation of migration is not simply articulated through what Foucault (1985) described as moral codes connected to knowledge/power regimes, but through the reflexive shifting of micro-level temporal and spatial paradigms of presence and absence. Thus, migration here is also legitimized through constructing perceptions of already somewhat lessened responsibility over Andrea’s life course, based on his previous move and subsequent weekend presence, and how that inflected their own relationship as a couple in retirement.

In addition, the life course of migrants also played a significant role in how these frictions were articulated. Not having a spouse/partner could increase friction, creating feelings of responsibility from loved ones to provide greater care. Serena’s family, for instance, worried about her, because she was single. Her mother said: “Of course, if she had a husband or someone to be with, I would be less worried”. Equally, having a spouse/partner could ease friction, because loved ones migrated with someone. In part, Andrea’s parent’s resistance to his migration related to worries of him not meeting new people due to what they termed his somewhat “closed” character. They expressed their relief that he did not go alone and that Giulia had helped him:

He’s inserted him-self well (into London). I didn’t imagine it, with his character, but I think it’s also because of Giulia … I think she’s more open, has a lot of friends…I think the closeness of Giulia helped him a lot.
The complex interplay of (im)mobility and ethics that link lives within the life course, is crucial to understanding the emergence migration (Findlay et al., 2015). Friction and subsequent responsibility attached to kin relations is articulated through the intersection of shifting perceptions of Andrea, his mobility and growing romantic relationship.

Frictions from migration can also mark iterations of absence and presence and elements of friendship and kinship between members of different groups. Cadence, her sister Marg, and sister her Alice all recognized that Cadence and Marg had always had a closer connection. A connection strongly related to qualities of friendship deriving from common age that put them close together in school, leading to as Cadence remarked, “her friends are my friends”. That also helped foster similar interests and outlooks, including over boys and travel. Cadence and Alice, though, had never really been close due to an age gap, where Cadence said that Alice “was never any fun”. During Cadence’s late teens, though, her parents divorced, creating divisions between family members that lead to several migrations (and return migration to Italy) within the family, and sometimes years of no contact. Marg lamented that, “I’ve got a couple of years where my sisters’ lives, that um, that are lost in my memory. I don’t know about them”. While Marge was highly supportive of Cadence’s move, her migration, however, also brought forth some of the more difficult aspects of migrant mobility that develop through the life course. Absence of commitment in their history, thus, played a significant role in shaping how she would come to perceive Cadence’s migration and frame keeping in touch around commitment related to children:

So, in a way, I love it, because we’re all over the place, because we’ve chosen to do things and we’re succeeding in it and sometimes you need to, to sacrifice things to be able to reach your goals. So, you know, normally, when we move country, it’s for, it’s a career decision. So its evolve, so for me, its something, it’s a happy event in that way that whoever goes abroad, it means that they’ve got something going on, that it could lead them to something better, to a better life. On the other hand, it’s just still, we’re still not in the same city and when Cadence told me ‘I’m moving to London’ I actually thought ‘you had to wait ten years of me in London and then I left London’, and I was really much gutted. I was like ‘come on’, you know, I was there for ten years, and I had to uh,
so, I was a bit, not upset, yeah, gutted that we couldn’t be in the same city, because, to be honest, the more I grow old, the more I’d like to reconnect with my family.

While Cadences mobility is situated positively, however, it is also viewed as a missed opportunity for re-constituting more stable relationships, particularly considering that Cadence gave birth to a child in parallel to migrating. Power does not necessarily emerge from the tension between the sedentary and nomadic, but the ability to track (Jensen, 2009), follow or create a level of surveillance (Molz, 2004) over trajectories from a distance. Friction does not result from a binary between sedentary and nomadic moralities, but results from shifting intersections of mobility, immobility and life course moments that ethically frame shifting ontologies of absence and presence, and qualities of relationships. Crucially though, these intersections produced hope for increased responsibility for Brigitte, Marg and Cadence to re-constitute relations around the support for children through ICTs and visits.

9.2.3 Frictions and Continuing Migration

Pulling out in scope, it is important to point out how this dynamic is at work across personal communities, between friends and family, and for those who had migrated several years ago. In Paola’s personal community, for instance, she described the impact of having children had had on her mobility patterns. Paola described that habits of keeping in touch centred significantly on friendships in London and abroad, while contact with her brother and mother was significantly less. Visits between friends and family to London had strong parallels in that they were orientated strongly around tourism. Like Alice and Cadence, Paola and Riccardo never developed identities around common interests, or common friends, with Riccardo saying “we never had that component of friendship”. In regard to her mother, in separate interviews, Paola and Flavia described that until recently, they have had a “confictual” relationship with Paola, saying her mother can be “very controlling”. This contributed to rhythms of visits that Paola described had been as mostly in one direction, something she didn’t appreciate:

My mom comes here a lot more often now. She couldn’t be bothered to come here before. Well, she’d come once a year, maybe, and now, she knows (London borough) very well. She comes, she would be kind of a bit shy about flying.
In describing the change in responsibility for contact, Flavia explained that she did not like to travel alone and did not like technology. In addition, though, she suggested that she was attempting to find a balanced relationship and did not want to be too intrusive:

With Paola, you need to have an incredible balance, because if you press too hard, she would react like a lion, because it’s her independence. But if I were too distant, she would think you don’t love her. So, I had to walk on a knives edge, for several years. It was like that.

After the birth of the children, thought, Paola’s expectations for visits were met. Flavia explained that “now I’m needed”, and went on to say that “I understood that anyway, for her I was taking the plane, going to see how she was. I really like London, and so she calmed down.” Thus, the birth of children signaled a warming of the relationship in that it helped to frame the power relations that fostered somewhat reduced commitment for contact and how those relations were changing.

**9.3 Friction, Heat and Relations of Presence**

Cresswell (2013) has argued for understanding the manner in which connections and mobilities are produced through the management and distribution of friction. Important here, he insists, is thinking through the generation of heat as a potential mobilizing force. This section aims to look at personal communities as trans-local heat distribution and friction management systems, or how overlapping life course identities come to inform the inter-subjective and relational construction of an ethics commitment to different forms of mobilities of co-presence. Shifting identities come into contact producing friction, and heat is generated as a by-product that must be directed and channelled. Distribution causes different levels of heat between relationships that link together multiple relations that perform ethical commitments of kinship and friendship through keeping in touch, and framing life course moments through ordered relations of presence.

**9.3.1 Hot Relations**

As intersecting life course identities of friends and family begin to shift, frictions emerge between identities that both construct those identities and influence the ethics that manage how those identities will be performed and become inter-dependent. During the fieldwork, it was
initially clear that frictions can at first emerge and be managed at an individual level. For individual relationships, a common thread in interviews was that friction and the ability to manage friction were clear indicators of both quality and commitment to relationships. Friction, managed on an individual basis, is important in sustaining the heat of affective relations. Chapter six described how Cadence, Marge and their mother Brigitte had formed a collective understanding for Brigitte to orient her future retirement/return migration around visits from Cadence and Marge; and importantly, Alice was not a part of these plans. Part of what sustains such affective fantasy of solid intimacy and directs affective attachment, is how each relationship manages friction. Cadence, for instance, described that part of what has made her relationship with Marg grow, is that “I can tell her to go to hell and five minutes after it’s fine. We calm down and that’s it”. Pushing further, Cadence described how this relates to how she connects differently with friends on Skype:

With friends, I have to say goodbye, it can take twenty minutes. I can hear my sister when I want, and it’s easy with her. I just call my sister, because I have just ten minutes, or like okay I’m bored now, bye bye bye, no offence…Marg gives me the opportunity to do how I want.

Thus, the ability to manage friction reinforces notions of kinship as informal in her relationship with Marg and commitment within the shifting relations of Cadence’s personal community. This is also the case with Cadence and Brigitte. Both described their relationship in tumultuous terms that often bordered not only on heat, but fire, risking burning up. There were strong examples, though, of how they managed friction. During Brigitte’s first visit to London, for instance, Cadence became so upset with Brigitte that the ensuing argument resulted in Brigitte spending the last two days without seeing Cadence and her family. Afterwards, Brigitte explained how she managed the situation:

It’s a very difficult relationship. I can’t tell you how much I cried. I came back completely depressed, it was bad. But I waited. I didn’t write. I thought ‘calm down my girl,’ then let’s see. After three months she sent me pictures of (Cadence’s daughter).

Soon after they resumed digital contact that then resulted in Cadence visiting Rome just a few weeks before my interview with Brigitte in Rome. It is clear that affect equates to fantasy, as
seen in Brigitte’s account in chapter six. Affective experiences of mobility, however, can also indicate the disciplining of mobile subjects through affective experiences of moving with relative ease or difficulty (Sheller, 2016). Here, the experiencing of anguish and sadness and subsequent waiting to act constitute a mother as mobile subject. Brigitte described that “there will always be conflict”, but suggested that the relationship works around the idea that “we always need some distance”. Thus, part of how their relationship develops, is through the relational ethics of friction and affective management between physical and digital spaces. This management incites the self-disciplining of those ethics after migration, allowing continued commitment to digital and physical co-presence.

In addition, the production and management of friction can expand far beyond the nuclear family or small group that can result in partial transfers of heat and varying roles of authority connected to responsibility. Again, a crucial aspect of how this begins, is a shift in ethical relations of care for the self. In interviewing Paola and her friends and family, a common image was that Paola is career focused. Several friends and family, in fact, expressed surprise that Paola had chosen to marry and have children. Paola her self expressed how building a family was explicitly related to meeting Jack, contributing to confirming her life in London, and did indeed mark a change in life course. When asked about the choice to marry, she explained:

I love him … it was related to Jack, I decided to marry him and have children. To Jack, absolutely. I wasn't certainly looking to get married and have children in general. I just, I did it because I wanted to do it with Jack. It wasn’t my lifetime aspiration.

Romantic love in the conjugal couple is crucial in understanding reflexive management of self (Giddens, 1992). Marrying Jack and having children singled a shift in Paola’s reflexive migrant project of care for the self. In building a family, several informants described a strong desire for recruiting help with childcare from loved ones abroad (and in London), with Jack saying “travel is just childcare in another location, so we tend to plan around where is there help?”. Flavia quickly became a key figure who aids with childcare that contributed to an increase in digital and physical co-presence. This shift in co-presence, though, also rapidly produced new frictions that did result in a level of friend-like equality described by Giddens (1992) as democratization of child-parent relationships. Paola described frictions with Flavia
related to her authority as a mother that they addressed, but that would sometimes emerge again, requiring further management:

I was very clear with her from the beginning, knowing how she was. When (child) was born, she was very keen to be a grandmother. And I told her ‘look, I want you to be very very close to my children, just don’t ever, ever tell me what to do. Ever ever ever’. She really respected that. She’s very good at respecting now. She’s very, she’s back on track as I said, but there was that period of three months in which she started to tell me what to do and make comments about my parenting style, which I didn’t appreciate. She starts to, by mistake obviously; she started to say ‘(child’s name) come to momma instead of (child’s name) come to grandma’.

Increased co-presence can usher in increased surveillance and new micro level ethical regimes of self-disciplining (Molz, 2004). Flavia also reported how she understood the formation of the new ethical terms of commitment that would shape co-presence:

She wants (child) to get some of what she got as a child. And that makes me feel good. Then, I learned not to argue with her … you have to do what the parents say. So you follow them, they know, I follow their rules.

The affective fantasy of solid relations is highly dependent upon the formation and continued negotiation of friction as relational ethics that constitute the power infrastructure of relationships, or the mutual recognition of ethical relations to self. Paola’s recognition of Flavia’s own mode of self-recognition, or what Flavia described earlier as her desire for “the big family,” combined with Flavia’s awareness of Paola’s autonomy, fosters relations of equality that affords the possibility for the mutual development of selves.

9.3.2 Warm Relations

The heat of Flavia’s commitment is primarily linked to the desire for commitment and ability to manage friction within Flavia and Paola’s relationship. The heat, however, is also generated from the manner in which friction and heat created between Flavia and Paola can be distributed and managed between members of Paola’s personal community that create new frictions. Importantly, though, while these relations warm through, fostering responsibility across relationships, they do not reach the same level of responsibility as Flavia.
Flavia’s relationship with Paola helped warm Paola’s relationship with Riccardo. Ricardo explained how his perception of Paola, and the context of their relationship, shifted in part in relation to the shift in the relationship between Flavia and Paola:

It’s strange. I never saw her (Paola) as a mom. It’s strange to see her all sweet with the kids, because I always saw her as precise, a little rigid…or for example when Jack asked her to marry him, the first thing she did was call mom. She was crying. Obviously, I didn’t expect that she would be so moved. I, anyway, I always saw them arguing. So the fact she wanted to call mom first, was a surprise. From there, it started changing.

Thus, the temporal shift in his relationship with Paola is orientated around his changing perception of his sister as becoming increasingly anchored in kinship relations and not a career women seeking out work abroad. This in turn helped mobilize Ricardo’s relationship with Paola. Ricardo asserted that he appreciated how his sister continually attempted to integrate him, his long-time partner and Flavia into the children’s lives, and attempted to help care for the children as often as possible. The temperature of Ricardo’s ability to help care for children, though, is directly linked to his partner Federica and their own co-project of personal growth. Ricardo is unemployed, has no children and described having no previous experience with children, but he and Federica, “we want to open our own nursery soon”. He prefers to play with the kids, while Flavia and Federica do the “dirty work”. In regard to Federica, he said, “she does nappies, makes the meals, she’s amazing with the kids, she does the proper work”. For Ricardo, friction management is part of what Foucault (1985) called games of truth in a relationship with self that allows him to articulate truth of being. Riccardo simultaneously actualizes a commitment to Federica and their potential employment future, and his sister, in how he recognizes himself as an uncle through the experiences of aiding with childcare during visits. Thus, while there is friction between Riccardo and Paola in divergent life course identities, that friction is in fact managed through the life course status of Ricardo in that his partner helps facilitate his participation in the care economy.

In a similar fashion, Ricardo has become crucial in helping sustain Flavia’s care mobilities that in turn help develop relationships between Flavia and Paola’s families. First, he aids his mother by helping set up the computer. While Flavia significantly improved her digital fluency after the birth of the children, she still requires some assistance. As she and Ricardo live
together, Flavia often calls Riccardo to come home and set up the computer, Riccardo described that, “she uses that little tone (uses soft voice)” and “because it makes her feels better, so I go home and organize the computer, so she can talk. Wherever I am, mom calls me”. In addition, Ricardo described that he attempts to help organize rhythms of visits to London to benefit Flavia, who he knows has a strong desire to see the children, saying “I prefer to let mom go more often”, or so that Paola’s family benefits. He explained that:

Ricardo: We divide it. Or mom goes or me and Federica go.

Interviewer: Why never all three together?

Ricardo: So we can help them more often. All three wouldn’t be useful, would be six months without anybody. Like this, mom goes, then three months later we go.

Thus, the ordering of daily life around rhythms of visits and digital contact is an example of how friction is distributed and managed across personal communities. Riccardo though does not take on the same level of commitment in direct interaction with the children as Flavia. Yet, through their co-management of friction Flavia’s commitment becomes hot, while Riccardo and Federica’s sense of commitment heats to warm. The degrees of temperatures are mutually productive. Furthermore, Riccardo’s participation, and thus, the extent of Flavia’s commitment, is highly dependent on Federica and their plans together. It seems to reason that without Federica, the temperature of Riccardo’s commitment could be significantly lower.

How friction is generated and managed between Jack and Flavia also proved crucial to producing mobilities of co-presence. Across interviews with Jack, Flavia and Paola, they did discuss some difficult or awkward moments during visits between Jack and Flavia. However, in parallel, there was also reflexive awareness of managing problems and appreciation. Flavia remarked that she was pleased that Jack, “he’s really happy to come here”. Paola saying to her mother “she really made an effort to accept Jack”. Congruently, Jack explained that despite some light difficulties, he and Flavia had created a good relationship. He described this example:

She’s always been very kind to me. What’s more important to me is that we’ve had a few chats where, you know, like the night before our wedding … Flavia and I sat in the kitchen and just had a chat. She told me about her relationship to her husband, who died,
very kind of, very, you know, it was almost like an emotional way. She was saying, ‘well you know kind of, we love each other very much, and it’s important to find a partner you can trust. And I had that with (husband)’. And we (had) this kind of chat, and I felt she was kind of giving me her, and I always knew she liked me, and in that moment she was giving me her absolution, like you, and sort of saying you are worthy.

As Paola and Flavia’s relationship mobilized further co-presence, frictions between Flavia and Jack were produced, the management of which, though, contributes to further mobilities and the warming of relations between Jack and Flavia. The management of friction between them contributes to producing the reciprocity of Flavia’s aid with childcare and her hopes to developing an identity as a grandmother.

The temperature of Flavia’s commitment is also produced through her relationship with Jack and subsequently, her relationship with Jack’s family living in Germany. The space provided here, cannot possibly account for the rich detail of ethical relations uncovered between the two trans-local families during fieldwork. One vital element that needs highlighting, though, is the formation of ethical values of balance and fairness that would apply to an array of issues from rhythms and destinations of visits, baptisms of children, to paying for dinners. As Flavia mentioned, “it has to be that everything is perfectly balanced”. Importantly, when imbalances where discovered in a new area of relations, they had to be managed. For instance, Flavia spoke about Jack instructing his parents to allow her to have more control over the children when Jack and Paola are not present, as Flavia has more regular presence with the children. Like Riccardo, Jack’s mother prefers to take less responsibility for the actual care, while Jack’s father is more active in providing a variety of help with the children. Flavia spoke of trying to involve Jack’s father as much as possible:

They’re grandparents like me. I started to involve them, so I said, ‘(grandfather), uh, how should we dress the girls? It’s very cold. I’m not used to the cold, you are. Can you tell me how to dress them? Or, ‘(grandfather), we don’t have this, I can’t go, can you go?’ ‘I’ll go.” Then he’d run to the supermarket. Or ‘(grandfather) you’re good at cooking this, will you cook that tonight…I try to collaborate with him, to try to maintain the balance, so they’ll like me. They know the baby is a little closer to me. You have to maintain a balance.
It is through the relationship with Flavia, in part, that the warmth of Jack’s father’s commitment is produced. Simultaneously, this relationship also helps construct Flavia’s hotter commitment to mobilization of co-presence by recognizing her more integral position with the children through the ethical pretence of maintaining balance. Flavia has become a key interlocutor in the construction and distribution of knowledge surrounding her daughter and family that work as a disciplining force extending out horizontally through relations with extended family. Flavia’s problematizations of self that lead to forging a trans-local self, becomes recognizable and is monitored around a cluster of identities (grandmother, mother, mother in-law, etc.) tethered to others through practice that simultaneously distributes responsibly around child care and mediates relations between in-laws, enabling continued mobilities of keeping in touch, and replicating the position of authority of Paola and Jack as parents. The production of friction and friction management distributes identity and responsibility, ordering relations and practices of co-presence at the trans-local level, and articulates particular assemblages of relationships within life course moments as relations of presence. Contrary to a thesis of pervasive individualized ethics where responsibility stems from individualized narrative biographies (Freudendal-Pedersen, 2013), this section demonstrates how increased mobility and reflexive ethics of self lead to a heterogeneous sharing of responsibility. In a similar vein, this is not a radical relationality often understood in affect theory, but one where relations are managed, and operationalized (Long & Moore, 2013b) and compositions of relations can stick (Chau Yuet, 2013). This stickiness, however, is a result not of kinship norms, but the inter-subjective construction of desires and commitment between individuals.

9.4 Friction, Cooling Responsibility and Relations of Reduced Presence

9.4.1 Cool Relations

As friction and heat can help uncover power relations (Cresswell, 2013), the cold or cooling of relations produced from friction can be equally as instructive. Identities are as much articulated by absence as by presence - or the relational focus on certain relationships over others that define life course moments through certain aggregations of relations of life course moments through absence. Affective and ontological frictions can act as a disciplining force that produces immobile subjects (Sheller, 2016) or different degrees of cooled responsibility within personal communities.
Between warm commitment and cold commitment there are relations governed through a sense of cool commitment. Cool commitment is the temperature that describes Andrea’s relationship with his parents. The initial friction generated from Andrea’s move created some heat, leading to frequent ICT contact and one visit to London. The potential for further mobility though, was slowed through the internal frictions of his parents as a couple and the manner in which they connect differently to their adult children. When interviewing Andrea’s parents, tensions continually emerged in relation to both their relationship as a couple and how they connect with Andrea and Eleanor. Lorenzo described that, as a couple, they had lost common interests, by saying “our common interest was the mountains, but after the kids were born, she stopped hiking, but I continued to hike as much as I can. I brought Andrea and Eleanor, with friends, during holiday”. When asked to describe their family, the conversation quickly turned to how they manage frictions as a couple, with Lorenzo saying it is important:

To learn to live together, to put up with each other. To put up with each other to live. To discover that there’s lots of differences, but even so you can live together. Also with different interests, so it’s work that’s long, daily and that requires patience. Because otherwise, if you just look for things in common, you would just say goodbye.

Shortly after Lorenzo’s description, Tina commented that she tries to adapt to help maintain the relationship, but “when it doesn’t suit me, I do it separately. It’s also a way to keep the family together, especially when there’s kids”. The last sentence in Lorenzo’s account and Tina’s account highlight the ethics of their relationship as a couple that comes to play a key role in constituting the potential for further co-presence with Andrea. Furthermore, it is worth noting that both Lorenzo and Andrea described having a relationship that included engaging in a wide range of common interests, such learning languages, technology and engaging in common activities together, such has hiking and photography. In addition, Lorenzo suggested that he is fond of travel, having travelled extensively for work, while Tina commented that travel is difficult for her. These threads framed the discussion on the potential for continued visits to London. After persistent encouragement they had visited Andrea once. Yet they were unsure whether to seek out further visits. Lorenzo argued for continued visits on tourism grounds, using his sister who visited Andrea, but who had already been to London as an example:
Lorenzo: It’s obvious when you go to a city if you have a person in which, you have a relationship, you go gladly. If that person accompanies you also to visit places

Tina: And that person is your son you go gladly

Lorenzo: Of course

Tina: That person is your son.

Lorenzo: He’s not lost on some isolated land. And then everything that London offers to see, of course, in fact, my sister went back gladly, because she had seen some things. Now, they saw other things, they were really happy.

Tina on the other hand did not desire further travel. Instead, she suggested her focus was more on helping Eleanora care for her new son. In addition, while she was initially anxious about Andrea’s move, she felt more comfortable with the new reality:

Tina: I’m happy to see him once a year. What’s important is that he’s happy there. I saw him happy. Us heading up, I don’t know, because, now we have a grandson, so, maybe next year.

Lorenzo: Its not like, if you go away for a week, (grand son) disappears.

Tina: Yeah, yeah, I know

Lorenzo: There’s other grandparents.

Tina: Lorenzo, you don’t understand. It’s not about others, it’s me. If I want to go away, I want to go away relaxed. Why should I leave in anguish? I know Eleanora is thin, she’s not able to eat, I want her to eat, because she’s thin.

She continues this discussion in relation to potential visits when her grandson will reach nursery age, where she suggests that she would like to care for the grandson instead of sending him to nursery:
I would like to help Eleanora, I like nurseries but with grandparents it’s a totally different thing. I would prefer, but the parents do what they want. But I would prefer at least until la materna (3 years), if not, the kids just get sick.

Ironically, the initial frictions related to the legitimization of Andrea’s move, actually, contribute to a cooling of relations with his mother and framing a need for commitment to Eleanora and her new child. There are parallels here with the waning of motility, or agentive potential for mobility (Doherty, 2014), in that normative kin obligations and Tina’s dislike of travel and ICTs contribute to a general reduction of co-presence. Importantly, though, considering the earlier ethics of having to “learn to live together” and having to “do it separately”, Tina and Lorenzo’s relationship simultaneously creates friction that inhibits the potential for visits that Lorenzo argued for. This relates to a fidelity defined less by a law than by a style of relating to the wife, by a way of being and behaving with respect to her (Bell, 2012; Foucault, 1985). Lorenzo’s desire for travel and tourism and his relationship history with Andrea suggest the potential for developing relations more in line with friendship, based on common leisure interests. In contrast to Flavia above, his ability to co-construct knowledge of self through mobilities to visit Andrea and distribute that knowledge, is inhibited through the conjugal relationship with a spouse. The linking or not of lives (Elder et al., 2002) through the life course happens through the relational construction of Tina and Lorenzo’s retirement and their internal relationship ethics. Lorenzo maintains daily contact with Andrea through ICTs that helps keep Tina in contact with Andrea, thus, keeping their relationship with Andrea above cold. Tina’s relationship with Eleanora, though, forges commitment to one adult child and a grandson that then inhibits their spousal relationship to taking on warmer commitment towards Andrea.

Cinzia’s relationship with Paola is also an example of a cool relation that is constructed relationally within a personal community. Cinzia indicated how her close friends are like family and how friction created that bond, “I always called my real friends family. The party I organize on Christmas is for my other family. It’s my way of being. I’ve argued with all them. Its always connects you more”. Again, Foucault insists ethics not to be a search for truth but for ethical self-stylization, or the will to be a moral subject that affirms one’s liberty, in which one can recognize one’s self (Bell, 2012). Cinzia’s excerpt, here, is constitutive of an ethics of self that frames how she can recognize herself, and others, through practice - an ethics that forms a commitment for
continued mobile co-presentation, built on recognition of Paola’s shifting life course identity. In further discussing her outlook, she gave an example of when she visits London:

Now, we’re at a level that we know each other so well, we know where not to go. It’s great when you reach that level, because if you overcome it, it means you’re a true friend, that you love their defects. For example, Paola, is fixated on organization, a lot, especially since living in London, and since being with Jack. It stresses me out, when I’m there I don’t know what I’m doing in an hour, but I know I have to tell her. If not she’ll get mad. I know I have to accept it.

Regulating emotions is crucial to how people formulate and link an ethics of responsibility to others (Evans & Thomas, 2009). Cinzia’s account is an example of self-disciplining that forms an obligation to Paola, and that also manages emerging frictions between her and Paola’s own shifting identities as a spouse and migrant, further developing her commitment to visit London.

Cinzia, however, did not form a commitment to childcare. Thus, while the management of friction can warm relations, a commitment to childcare remains a crucial form of commitment for Paola and Jack. The forging of trans-local kin relations causes frictions that can lessen commitment to friends. This relational ethics of commitment articulates affinities of certain sets of relationships over others. Paola described regretting that she has not been as able to pursue contact to a greater extent with her closest friendships both in London and abroad since the birth of her children. In part, she explained this in relation to difficulties of daily logistics and additional nursery costs that limited travel. However, she also hinted that the children are not at an age that her closest friends, who do not have children, can easily connect to. She hopes to change this in the future:

I hope they would be able to build a relationship with some of our friends as well. And that would help a lot, actually, and then I would like to see people a bit more often, but I think for a few more years, it’s just gonna be difficult.

Jack also described these difficulties by directly linking the form of intimacy present in visits to the ability to assume responsibly for childcare:
A friend of Paola’s who doesn’t know the kids very well, that may not have kids of her own, they wouldn’t’ know what to do … let’s say Paola and Anna, they might have been on the lash the night before…The next morning I would do the babysitting. Or Paola would, if I’ve been out. It’s just the way we do it. But the big difference, they can’t take responsibility for the children.

He then goes on to explain how this relates to Flavia, Riccardo and Francesca:

Whereas with Flavia, we’d still do the kind of go to the science museum one day, but on the Sunday we’d actually do nothing. We just literally lie in bed, like you know kind of and she would just look after them, but she just loves playing around with them. For Flavia, giving her that grand parenting responsibility, it’s a gift for her. Its not a burden. That’s the kind of difference but you do make more of an effort, apart from Flavia, with Riccardo and Federica.

Jack suggests that Paola’s family’s commitment to the children lessens expectations to host by offering the possibility for childcare, while single friends have not fostered that commitment, in part, due to their own life course situation. To an extent, the responsibility fostered by certain family members through friction management produces a relational ontology that constructs friends, and single friends, as ‘Other’. This dichotomy also orients friendship more around consumer tourism, while family may not expect the same degree of tourism activity. It should be noted, though, that this ontology is decidedly situational in that Cinzia’s level of commitment parallels in many ways that of Jack’s mother. Both have on-going commitment to mobile co-presence, yet, abstain from extensive childcare. Furthermore, Riccardo’s commitment is highly dependent upon the commitment of Federica. Thus, this thesis argues that these examples do not provide evidence to the durability of kin structures that reduces the importance of friendship. Instead, the material here demonstrates that heterogeneous relationships of different individuals recognize and sustain Paola’s migrant project by developing varied levels of commitment across multiple categories of relationships.

9.4.2 Cold Relations

In addition to cool relations, there was also interview data that suggested the formulation of a cold sense of commitment. The development, for instance, of Chiara’s friendships in
London in regard to her own personal growth contributes to framing the ontological cooling of family relationships in Italy. According to Chiara, her friends in London significantly aided in developing a lifestyle that affords the extensive pursuit of her personal interests. Furthermore, Chiara described the general rise in importance of her friends and how she has come to see these friends as possessing qualities that parallels family:

I mean my family will always be important, for sure, in a certain way, but also the substitute family, my group of friends. The friends you have in a certain sense become your sort of English family, your family in England … some are single, some in a couple, but the thing that I like, this sensation that we can count one on the other, if I need something I know that I can count on them. If they need something, they can count on me.

Friendships offer an important source of continuity for the identities and elective communities of those who are single (Budgeon, 2006) and means of care that can intensify from migration (Walsh, 2009). The development of self and commitment with local friendships in part contributes to framing commitment with family relationships in Italy. When Chiara bought a flat in London, this caused friction with family and some heat. Chiara’s family helped finance the house and her mother visited (with the sister) for the first time in several years. Divergences, however, via digital mobilities over the meaning and responsibility of the buying process emerged. Chiara described that for her parents and sister “the house is a starting point for your family”, something that didn’t reflect her life, but contributed to an interpretation that for her family “it was important for them, because they knew I wasn’t coming back”. In fact, Chiara mentioned there was no talk of further visits to London. In part, buying the house signalled further detachment, or cooling, from her family in the migration process. Furthermore, implicit expectations from her parents to aide in the selection of the house went unrealized, causing some friction. Chiara described the conversation as “we can’t tell you about the area, if it’s a nice house or not. We can’t help with the documentation. They can’t say much with a photo.” In contrast, she explained that “I feel more comfortable talking to my friends here about, life here”. Thus, as with Andrea’s parents there can be some initial heat that is cooled as the care economy that might otherwise provide connection is subverted and the inter-dependence of friendship is highlighted.
In addition, the production of heating and cooling relations through friction produces divisions within families. The centering of trans-local relations around Cadence, her sister Marg and their mother Brigitte’s retirement plans, but not their sister Alice, is a strong example. To explain Alice’s exclusion, Marg, Cadence and Brigitte all cited that Alice is difficult to create a reliable relationship with, as she avoids commitment and that she has a strong connection to her husband’s family who live locally. Brigitte explained:

So, stay in (Italian city) to see Alice, no, because Alice is particular, she’s, she finally found a family. I’m happy that (husband) family, good for her, are so nice to her. I shouldn’t count on Alice. I mean, Alice if you need me, I’ll come. If you want to come to me, I’ll be there. But Alice for example, it was me that went to see her today. If not, it’s always like this. I was supposed to see her at 430, at 4:00 she calls, ‘I’m tired, I’m going home’. I didn’t see her. 30 minutes before she calls. It’s always like that. I can’t count on Alice. She has her life here. She’s happy, she has (husband) family here. They love Alice, and I’m happy.

This excerpt highlights the conditional nature of family relationships. While Marge, Cadence and Bridgette downplayed the problematic nature of excluding Alice from retirement plans, Alice, on the other hand, expressed opposition to the potential move. Fitting with her account in chapter seven that local intimacy is of higher quality, she described that the relationship with her mother “intensified, we’re closer” since Cadence’s migration. She thought that, “it’s a good relationship” and “I can see her, when I want”. A move to France created fear, because “I detach from people”, and would equate to “we would have to organize in advance, that would cut my wings”. She further explained that “I would feel like the last one in (Italian city). I would be like my sisters, one in (French city), one in London, alone, with a husband and without family around”. The reinforcement of kin relations does not necessarily equate to a homogenous and inclusive development of those relations. Indeed, distanciated relationships can highlight divergences of movement that aid staying put for some and not others, different levels of loyalties and their orientation to past, present and future (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2003; Walsh, 2009). Alice constructs understandings of her sisters and mother, and their hopes for the future, as mobile Others in contrast to her own self-development through hopes of permanence in place. Brigitte positions Alice as sedentary and not needing care, which legitimizes her own ambitions
of return migration and developing an identity as a grandmother. Through friction, contrasting conditions linked to diverging ethics of self-surveillance can become apparent, thus, revealing the cooling of some relationships. This frames responsibility towards trans-local relationships over local relations that impede the potential for mobility involving Alice.

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to set out how the ethical cultivation of selves can foster greater and lesser intensities of interdependence within personal communities. At any given moment, life course trajectories within personal communities contain different temperatures of commitment attached to overlapping identities of mobility and stillness, and producing various degrees of what has been termed as linked lives (Elder et al., 2002; Findlay et al., 2015). As trajectories begin to change, new frictions are produced that expose existing or past frictions and that frame the production of new micro-paradigms of absence and presence.

Friendship and kinship are not temporally and spatially isomorphic categories, whose meanings are defined according to particular pre-determined qualities or activities, as has been argued in tourism literature on VFR (Backer, 2007; T. Seaton & Tie, 2015). It is important to understand how informants attribute meanings of kinship and friendship, and parallel meanings of responsibility for themselves, with particular members of personal communities. Different personal communities contain different configuration of friendship and kinship depending on life course moments (Pahl & Pevalin, 2005). Equally, different relationships, or groups of relationships, may have histories that contain overlapping meanings of kinship and friendship that come to articulate the conditions of possibility between intersecting life course trajectories at any given moment and for the future.
10 Conclusion

This thesis has been primarily concerned with developing an alternative avenue of conceptualization in regard to the socialities that underpin relations of co-presence between migrants and friends and family. The aim has not necessarily been to refute already existing literature, but to offer an alternative starting point for understanding how relationships and life course moments, in which they are embedded, are constituted through different forms of co-presence. An overall goal for the analysis and writing process has been maintaining an awareness that much theory on globalization has become disconnected from the actual lives of informants and their attempts to forge the global (Moore, 2011) that carries the risk of rendering theorization irrelevant, inward looking and self-satisfying. In this vein, the thesis argues that the empirical material presented on the lives of informants and the theoretical narratives used to conceptualize that material has offered the most poignant selection and relevant interpretation in relation to informant accounts.

10.1 Meeting Research Objectives

This thesis also argues that the main research question has been answered by meeting the individual research objectives. The thesis aimed to understand how ethical imaginations of togetherness are constituted from the manner in which migrants and friends and family utilize ICT and VFR practices for maintaining relationships. The most general finding in relation to the research question is that ethical imaginations are constituted through a tension between perceptions that relationships and identities/belongings attached to them have gone unchanged despite migration and other shifting life course contexts, as well as perceptions that relationships and identities/belongings have in fact changed through efforts of personal development and shifting life course trajectories. This tension framed the findings chapters and articulated responses to the research objectives.

Conceptualizing this tension was present in all four findings chapters and in how the thesis aimed, first, to understand which key relationships participate in practices of co-presence within personal communities and to what extent. Chapter seven argued that continuity and change should not be seen as contradictions, but reflect the struggle for subjective constructions of self within shifting inter-subjective life projects (Smart, 2007). These constructions that were described in all the findings chapters produce highly heterogeneous articulations of relations within personal communities. Keeping in touch fosters a sense of felt presence or continuity in
relationships that constructs a fantasy, or felt optimism for permanent or solid forms of intimacy that cross lines of gender, ethnicity/nationality, sexuality, age, as well as binary divides of friendship/kinship, local/non-local, mobile/non-mobile, migrant and tourist. While all relationships are enabled and disabled to a certain extent, together chapter seven and eight also revealed that felt presence is developed in parallel to shifting identities that provokes divisions in personal communities and divide those communities between those who re-develop a shared sense of identity and mobile belonging, and those relations that develop a sense of un-belonging that articulates relations of cruel optimism. To further clarify the heterogeneity of this picture, chapter nine explored the varied and relational articulations of responsibility that are produced from managing ontological frictions with personal communities.

The thesis has understood how participation in trans-local socialities change in different contexts of the life course by articulating the manner in which personal communities are dynamic relational matrices (Long & Moore, 2013b) of linked lives (Elder et al., 2002). While the thesis employed a cohort approach to understand how the intersection of time abroad and the life course inflects social relations, the fieldwork revealed that time abroad is only partially important. The only significant difference between cohorts was that those who were abroad longer, had more established local relationships that contributed to developing a migrant identity through more established practices of return visits with local friends and family. Instead, what appeared most important, was that personal communities are articulated through relationship genealogies and particular intersections of life course moments across personal communities and the inter-subjective capacity to develop and re-imagine a relational ethics of syncing life course moments through rhythms of physical and digital co-presence. Thus, once a relationship develops a strong level of intimacy, this importance is articulated through a felt connection that mediates the importance of time abroad and distance, depending on particular relational articulations of life course moments. Informants often discussed local and non-local relationships, or relationships produced before and after migration, in similar terms that seem to contradict a focus on keeping in touch as divided between two locations or migrant and non-migrants.

The preceding research objective, understand how different forms of commitment between friends and family are constructed in relation to ethical imaginations of self, was addressed first
in chapter 6. From there, the thesis argued that while all who were interviewed displayed felt connections articulated through practices of co-presence, this felt connection does not translate for all concerned into commitments of co-transformations of life course selves. For some, problematizations of self and belonging developed through migration can be co-developed between those migrants and friends and family by transforming the self into an imagination broker. An imagination broker is a form of ethical stylization and commitment to others that pertains to migrants and some friends and family. Driven by felt presence, informants co-develop life course moments by fostering self-monitoring systems that interpret daily life for instances where digital and physical co-presence is used to re-imagine selves in parallel to the lives of others and informants situate others in their own daily lives. In contrast, with other relationships, felt continuity can intensify spurring and sustaining keeping in touch, while simultaneously legitimizing and fostering values around reduced commitment to contact, guided by perceptions that relationships remain important. Yet, life course trajectories are diverging in part as a result of commitments to other relationships. In addition, commitment to others is partly developed in how shifting identities linked to life course moments that are constructed and distributed by others within personal communities.

The remaining research objectives are closely linked. One objective entailed understanding how the constitution of ethical selves through self-other relations is linked to fantasies of belonging. In addition, the last objective has looked to understand how rhythms of ICTs and VFR constitute forms of intimacy as belonging. In developing these objectives, the fieldwork revealed that both migrants and friends and family abroad are engaged in projects of care for the self, related to particular life course moments. Migration is a means to develop life projects (Smart, 2007), which destabilizes solid forms of identity and belonging. By keeping in touch, however, migrants and loved ones foster a sense of continuity that renders an affective and cognitive sense that solid intimacy is both possible and desirable. The sense of continuity drives fantasies for wholeness, which is intensified through digital and physical rhythms that blur material, spatial and temporal barriers and constitute a translocal mobile form of belonging consisting of shared imaginings, felt presence and values of intimacy. This sense of continuity, however, also turns cruel in that practices of keeping in touch intensify fantasies that solid intimacy is possible, while simultaneously producing an ontological politics that renders that form of intimacy and
belonging problematic. This relation is developed further through rhythms of keeping in touch, where perceptions of intimacy are articulated through contrasting digital and physical rhythms that generate understandings of un-belonging or where relationships are perceived as both uninterrupted and disconnected.

10.2 Main Theoretical Contributions

Implicit to the above objectives has been to help expose some of the weaknesses of current perspectives while further developing understandings of (im)mobilities within a context of intensifying globalization. The thesis has helped expose a few overall shortcomings of current perspectives on the social relations imbricated in keeping in touch. Before offering an overview of those shortcomings it is important to discuss the three overlapping perspectives from which these shortcomings emerges. The first shortcoming comes from the tourism literature on VFR that argues for both the separation of friendship and kinship, as well as that markets and culture are separate and fundamentally sovereign phenomena (Backer, 2008; Backer & King, 2015; A. Seaton, 1994). This literature appears to assume the outright durability and fixed nature of kin and cultural structures within globalization.

A second body of work from migration studies and tourism-migration research views social relations mostly as a politics or has generally made important progress in understanding the link between globalization’s shifting and inter-connected labour and consumer markets. This work has also helped understand the blurring boundaries of tourism and migration through the care and maintenance practices of distant kin relations and affirmation of ethnic identities (Baldassar, 1997, 2007b; Botterill, 2013; Coles & Timothy, 2004; Hall & Williams, 2002; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Parrenas, 2005; Reynolds & Zontini, 2013). This research has mostly viewed social relations as shifting, yet, sought to highlight the manner in which social and kin structures can be reproduced through globalization despite perhaps the heightened reflexive capacity of migrants in post-Fordist economies. A third area of inquiry revolves around concepts of individualization (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014), liquid love (Bauman, 2003) and democratization of kin authority (Giddens, 1992) that have come to underpin lifestyle migration (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). These theories generally equate globalization to heighten reflexivity, the dissolution of social structure and the penetrative force of neo-liberalism in articulating social
relations. Here, we are offered a view of migration devout of obligation to others and driven by the narrative capacity of individuals to shape their own biographies.

This thesis has helped highlight two interconnected points for understanding inflections of digital and physical VFR in the literature extant. First, theorizations have only to a limited extent been grounded in the actual accounts of informants in that the literature has been somewhat unable to conceptualize the simultaneous desire for re-constructing relationships after migration, while also building new individual lives through migration. Second, in regard to the latter, two bodies of work, these theories have been dominated by a teleological understanding of globalization that results in either a nostalgic pessimism in regard to mobility, technology and the social or a sort of cheery pessimism where structure is not necessarily dissolving, but it is dissolution itself that has become normative structure.

Therefore, the theoretical perspectives thus far have been over-determined by binary thinking of tradition versus loss, which views physical and digital VFR, either in isolation or together, through a continuum of either unshaken durability of social and ethnic relations on the one side, or as completely agentic and reflexive driven dissolution on the other. The thesis has hoped to demonstrate an alternative starting point that moves away from a focus on the moral elements of sociality, resulting in theory grounded in binary and teleological thinking of tradition/loss, together/apart or home/away. At the most general level, the findings chapters have highlighted how fostering socialities is an ambiguous, reflexive, relational, ethical and intersubjective process. Thus, in the lives of informants, rigid separations between kinship and friendship and between moral and consumer economies as depicted in some of the VFR tourism literature can make little sense. By the same token, mobility and ICTs cannot be blamed for the simultaneous dissolution of kinship and friendship, and penetration of the market into relationships. Nor can obligation and commitment be withdrawn from analysis, as they are both crucial means through which informants re-constitute selves and self-other relations. Digital and physical mobilities, tourism and migration, and the obligations and qualities of kinship and friendship are modes of transport that are combined and exploited by migrants and friends and family to re-imagine socialities and actualize projects of care for the self.

In addition, the migration and tourism-migration literature are arguing for the simultaneous disruption, yet, continuity of kin and ethnic norms, has been crucial in highlighting
the ambiguity of social relations. However, by continually focusing on either ‘ruptures’ (Botterill, 2013) to individualization or insisting on a dialectics (Madianou & Miller, 2011; D. Miller, 2007) between moral social structures and individuals, we either simply dilute individualization or implicitly acknowledge its accuracy. Furthermore, in focusing on the moral, we are still left with an understanding that informants are somewhat incognizant prisoners or dupes to deep structures of the mind (Hanna et al., 2015). This perspective, again, only partially accounts for the actual descriptions of informants. As chapter seven made clear, desire flows from migrant problematizations of self and self-other relations. Migrants demonstrated a conscious effort to use migration to be more open-minded in relation to other cultures or in relation to a romantic partner, to foster more relaxed daily routines that afford further development of personal interests, to be more independent and autonomous or to develop a career that will help constitute a new family. In league with these efforts, keeping in touch is a crucial means in care for the self and re-imagining self-other relations. Care for the self becomes apparent for instance in practicing independence or cultivating a more cosmopolitan way of being. Or perhaps later in migration, as with Paola, who chose marriage and children not necessarily to follow the rules of heteronormativity, but as a means to develop her migrant self through her relationship with Jack and staying put. For them, and because of the aid from family, both visits to Italy and receiving visits in London become moments to develop their family through combing tourism and care practices. Thus, outside market forces are not separate from or entirely responsible for structuring relationships through VFR. Instead, tourism acts as a permeable technology of thought that aids in the development of a relational ethics between Paola, Jack, their children and extended family.

This thesis has not argued that action is entirely a result of conscious thought, but sought to demonstrate the intertwinement of conscious desire and affective fantasy, habit, performance and aspiration. Importantly, this thesis has explored these dimensions in regard to trans-local personal communities. Thus, a methodological contribution of the thesis has been developing relationship maps to explore trans-local belonging. In addition, this thesis has tried to problematize notions of belonging within the tourism, migration, and tourism-migration literature that continually focuses on ethnicity, the national, and transnational as pre-dominate coordinates of belonging. Even in other work examining trans-local intimacies as belonging (Baldassar & Gabaccia, 2011), there is a continued propensity to turn back to the ethnic lens,
even while trying to escape from it. Academia needs further rich theoretical development that focuses on socialities and without reinforcing an understanding of ‘the social’ as society (Long & Moore, 2013a).

Belonging is not simply related to national or state apparatuses and ethnicity (Glick Schiller et al., 2006) or the conscious signifying of national identity through practice. Belonging can develop through highly subjective, yet, shared mobile intimacies grounded in common desires and common embodied rhythms that sustain fantasies, and perhaps only a few members of a personal community. Migration, having children, remaining single, or becoming a widow can all inform the contexts of life projects (Smart, 2007) that construct a desire to co-develop life course moments through keeping in touch. These subjective and conscious desires for wholeness are constructed in part through the feeling and performance of actual practices that foster affective fantasies for wholeness. Whether through the tone of voice used during a Skype chat or embodied interactions of visits, keeping in touch constructs a feeling “like the conversation just picked up where it left off”. It is important to point out that all relations develop the fantasy of wholeness and to a certain extent all relations turn to cruel optimism. The very act of keeping in touch can further articulate identities, belongings and ways of being that render redundant the type of physical proximity and insular belonging implicit to solid intimacy. Affective fantasy, though, has enabling and disabling effects (Berlant, 2011). Thus, the thesis argues that there is a strong divide within personal communities between those who link regimes of daily self-governance to migrants in London, and migrants to loved ones, and those who do so only to a limited extent.

Furthermore, desire, fantasy and practice cannot be divided into dialectical processes. People’s will to keep in touch does not only result from the durability of normative structure. The desire for connection and change stems from inter-subjective problematizations within particular life projects. These desires are confirmed through performance and the feeling of continuity that constructs hope for wholeness. Desire, fantasy and aspiration, and thus continuity and change form a unified reality within the ethical imagination. For this reason, belonging should also be understood through the manner in which it is constructed, both as conscious desire and a mobile taken-for-grantedness (Fallov et al., 2013).
A taken-for-grantedness developed through becoming an imagination broker. Transforming the self into an imagination broker requires self-governance and the monitoring of action by rethinking daily and yearly routines in order to connect and be connected to the imaginations of others. This is a process of individual and collective transformation, whose form will depend on the make-up of individual and collective life course moments and relationship histories that confound simple dichotomies of local/non-local, stayer/leaver, home/away, friend/family. In addition, this thesis has sought to deepen the conceptualization of the felt presence between friends as described by Cronin (2014). The thesis has done so by revealing, first, how fantasies for solid intimacy constructed through felt presence can cross borders of kinship and friendship; and second, by demonstrating that felt continuity in relationships is constructed through the temporal rhythms of ICTs and VFR. Thus, the fantasy of wholeness is constructed through the conscious desires of imagination brokers to connect and develop selves with others that foster feelings of un-interrupted continuity in relationships from the blurring together of ICT and VFR rhythms.

The thesis has also extended Cronin’s notion of sensed presence by understanding how that presence can turn into cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011). Mobilities of keeping in touch can forge a form of connectedness that constructs a felt potential for solid intimacy and belonging, yet, it is through those very practices that achieving that form of intimacy and belonging becomes highly problematic. Cruel optimism involves both conscious desire and unconscious optimism. Rhythms of digital and physical co-presence form polyrhythmic (Lefebvre, 2004) awareness, that impedes the formation of stable rhythms of intimacy, yet, simultaneously constructs a sense of felt presence and continuity in relationships that fuels optimism that belonging is still possible.

Therefore, the thesis has offered a means for viewing the intersection of sociability, familiarity and the exotic that does not involve binaries like home and away (Ashtar et al., 2016; Shani & Uriely, 2010; Uriely, 2010) and further reinforces arguments from tourism on the de-exoticification of tourism (Larsen, 2008). While arguments for home and away are particularly important in regard to the emotional and the experiential dimension of keeping in touch, examining affective components of co-presence help demonstrate that emotion is not affect (Berlant, 2011), and thus, experiences of home and away cannot be separated. When viewed
from the perspective of personal communities, two crucial questions emerge; home and away with whom and when? Even if we concede the existence of certain experiences of the exotic, it is important to not have an atemporal view of sociability and familiarity. Practices are always a work in progress and in many cases across multiple contexts. For many informants, the repetitious rhythms of digital and physical co-presence can reduce the exotic to such little consequence that it does not make sense to raise experiences of the exotic to the conceptual level of home and away. For those whose relations develop cruel optimism, chapter eight demonstrates that the more experiences of sociability become what could be termed exotic or away, the more affective fantasies are constructed that situate those experiences as familiar. Therefore, again, this thesis finds much more analytical purchase in attending to the actual and indivisible nature of subjective accounts by avoiding dividing informant narratives into dialectics of contradiction.

Lastly, by focusing on personal communities, the thesis has also hoped to demonstrate the continued relevance of analysis grounded in understanding the subject, difference and power. Albeit, this is not a notion of difference grounded in structures of gender, ethnicity or class. In doing so, the thesis has aimed to help highlight perhaps an underdeveloped area of the ethical imagination (Moore, 2011). Personal communities are arenas of personal life, where ‘Othering’ and identity politics foster difference, and thus, remain an important means through which the social is constructed. This would seem to suggest that social and cultural life is not simply a matter of satisfaction and fantasy as Moore suggests. Fantasy for solid relations may be distributed and becomes a potent force between multiple members of a personal community that leads to the dissolution of leaver/stayer and local/non-local. Thus, in part, the thesis argues that, for the most important relationships, personal communities should not simply be viewed as various degrees across a spectrum of blurring friends and family as has been suggested (Pahl & Spencer, 2010), but that personal communities are made of imagination brokers and relations of cruel optimism that produce heterogeneous re-imaginings of togetherness. However, the thesis does not argue that divisions of friends and family cannot be important, but that in part the affective drive for solid intimacy can reduce the relevance of kinship and friendship, and other categories, like tourist and migrant, to such an extent as to be unimportant. In addition, while friction can produce difference, this should be viewed through a lens of genealogies of relationships and dynamic relational matrices of linked lives, where qualities and commitments
like care for children, emotional support, or shared leisure habits can all be attached to a distant mother, close local friend or domestic migrant sibling. What is important, is how these qualities emerge and are linked to certain relationships through the relational dynamics of life course moments and management of frictions that are produced. Therefore, the thesis, at least in part, adds some credence to critique that affect is not universal (Leys, 2011) or radically relational, and further research is required into the stickiness of affect. Furthermore, this also confirms a need for longitudinal research of linked lives within migration studies (Findlay et al., 2015) to better conceptualize the distribution and perhaps dissipation of fantasy within different socialities over time.

To summarize the theoretical contribution, this thesis argues against viewing socialities of highly skilled migrants from the global north simply as governed by qualities of reflexivity, consumerism, and a lack of obligation, or that relationships are constituted through temporal and spatial divisions of consumer practice and cultural normativity. Instead, socialities emerge through ethical economies of intersecting projects of care for the self, where migration and tourism are modes through which migrants and friends and family re-imagine selves and socialities within particular life course moments that foster situated, inter-subjective and contingent forms of obligation.

The thesis also argues against understanding continuity and change as a dialectical politics or as a teleological process that prioritizes national belonging and transnationalism as ethnic renewal and cultural transferal within semi-stable social fields, and where for instance the family is the primary arena of personal life. Instead, the thesis has demonstrated that an important aspect of migrant personal relationships is not simply re-productions of cultural pasts through families but how certain relationships both afford feelings of continuity and co-construct present life course projects of the self and translocal forms of belonging within personal communities. Instead of rigid divisions of kin and kith, personal communities are divided between those who commit to co-construct a shared affective and imagined sense of wholeness, where informants expand horizons of belonging by fostering forms of embodied self-governance that connect imaginations and embodied rhythms to others, and those who feel connected yet whose identities are constructed as diverging. In addition, the thesis has argued that personal communities are highly contingent and relational, where, informed by relationship histories
ontological frictions produce change in the framing and construction of responsibility across personal communities. Thus, socialities of migrant personal relationships should be viewed as a series of inter-linked and situational forms of relatedness, producing shared and diverging imaginations of selves and belonging, cognitive desires for contact and affectations of attachment.

10.3 Limitations

The thesis did, however, have some limitations. The most important limitation was that due to time constraints the research did not interview friends in London, relationships that fell outside of the immediate sphere of importance and relationships that were no longer of any importance to informants and thus were not on the maps. However, it is argued that the findings presented in the thesis are not invalidated by the inability to interview London friends, but that interviewing friends would have likely added further depth to the co-development of life course trajectories locally in London. Furthermore, interviewing migrants twice provided in-depth accounts on friendships in London that were significantly helpful in understanding the relational dynamics of relationships across trans-local space.

In addition, interviewing all relationships, including those not present on the map would have gone beyond the scope of this research. It is, however, useful to point out that interviews with these relationships would have helped shed further light on affect, the ephemeral of and dissatisfactions in relationships. The thesis has demonstrated that affect can be both enabling and disabling, however, all relationships presented in the thesis had some degree of participation in the lives of loved ones. By including relations that were barley present or had dissolved further understanding could have been gained about how absence and the loss of relationships plays a role in shaping the ethics of migrant biographies, while also helping to understand how optimism for solid intimacy can fade completely in certain relationships. Furthermore, we cannot be sure, for instance, if the changes in relationships presented, here, result directly from (or only because of) migration or if there could have been similar changes if migrants would have decided against moving abroad. Future research could, thus, focus on comparisons between relationship trajectories of those who have migrated and those who have not.

In addition, by including the ethical dimensions of self and not exclusively focusing on practices, the thesis did not extensively approach researching the iterative, experiential and
temporal nature of digital and physical practices of keeping in touch. While the thesis argues that including ethical dimensions of relationships and selves aided in conceptualizing the intersection of life course moments, further research should be conducted regarding the iterative intertwinement of digital and physical VFR over time. An exclusive focus on practices would be better placed to grasp the habitual and emotional character of relationships in more depth as they are negotiated over time.

Lastly, the research has sought to problematize dichotomies between the Global North and South in relation to relative reflexive agency and constraint. This study, however, did not do the important work of comparing contrasting groups of unskilled migrants. Such a comparison is vital to understanding the manner in which global processes contribute to constituting differing attempts and forms of ethical actualizations of self. Furthermore, this comparative form of research is important in understanding how those forms of ethical self-governance within different groups from the Global North and South contribute to different articulations of relationships within person life and at different moments of the life course. This thesis strongly suggests that such research should be pursued in the future.

Works Cited


Desires and Fantasies for Togetherness: Physical and Digital VFR


Appendix

Figure One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Description - Italian Working Professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Categories</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age/Life course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Abroad/Migration experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic position</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
working professionals. academia, architecture, etc. The choice for socio-economic status relates to the probability of being less restricted for VFR by financial concerns. In addition, the choices of working professionals relates to contrasting normative relationship obligations against the assumption that the mobility of the affluent elite is nomadic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>English Italian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am able to speak fluently in English and Italian. Thus informants will have to be recruited according these language abilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sample Configuration**
Migrant informants: 6
Number of friends and People per network: 6-7
Spouses: 4
Total possible informants: 52
- Informants of friends and family will be chosen based on interviews with migrants.
- Interviews with migrants will be conducted alone, while interviews with friends and family will be conducted together, organized depending on descriptions of relationships from migrants.
- Interviews with spouses will be conducted with spouses
Cohorts:
1) 1-2 years; 2) 4-7 years (general aim will be between 4-7, but flexibility is needed here)
- Each cohort divided into three categories: unmarried, married, married with children.

**Figure Two**
Interview Guide Friends and Family

History of Relationships
- Can you explain some of the history of your relationship with (…)
- What qualities have been important for you with this relationship?
- How would describe the relationships between these people? What roles did they play?
- How do you fit into this?
- Within your family/friend group? What has been important about this group (friends/family) for you?
- Can you explain how you felt about (…) moving to London? Did it make a difference that were moving to London?

Practices of Keeping in Touch
Who keeps in Touch, through which means and to what extent between different people
- What does keeping in touch mean to you?
- Was keeping in touch something you thought to be important?
- What was important about your relationships with (…) that made you think it was/was not important for you to keep in touch?
- How do you keep in touch? Is it through visits or digital communications?
- What are the advantages/disadvantages of different technologies?
- What advantages/disadvantages does electronic communication have compared to visits?
- What is challenging/unchallenging keeping touch through visits and technology? How do you address challenges?
- Who keeps in touch within the group? Has it always been this way?
- Did you talk together about how to keep in touch? (if interviews are together)

Organizing keeping in touch, parameters of digital and physical VFR
- When do you use technology to communicate with (…) into your daily life?
- When do you like to have visits?
- How often do you keep touch? Why not more often or less?
- Is tourism and visiting places important for you? Does tourism play a large role in visits? Do you travel outside VFR? Does your family? Who do you travel with?
- How has how you have organized keeping in touch changed since (…) left? (For cohort two)
- In your daily life, does keeping in touch have any impact on your relationships here?
Interview Guide Migrants (second interview)

Migration at Present, Current Goals (some clarification about past as well)
- What is important for you at the moment in creating a life London?
- What you are most satisfied with at the moment in your life since moving to London?
- What is most difficult for you at the moment?
- What are you doing to address those difficulties?
- Are you considering any changes?

Friends/Developing relationships in London
- Who are your closest friends in London? (For many I already know though, they’re on the maps, for others its not so clear)
- Can you describe how you met these friends?
- What did you like about these friends
- Were there any difficulties in these friendships?
- What similarities or difference were there with previous friendships?
- What role would you say they play in your life now?
- Have you ever brought them back to Italy? If so, why was that important? If not, why not?

Spouses/partners
- Initially, was it important for you to bring them back to Italy? Why?
- In organizing visits home, what role does your spouse/partner play?
- What role do they play during visits?
- How do they play a role in organizing visits from friends and family?
- What role do they play when they are in London?
- Is that role different or the same with everyone?
- Have there been any difficulties related to your spouse/partner?
- How have you tried to address those difficulties?
- Do they play in role in how you organize your communication with friends and family with technology?

Disjuncture in Personal Communities and Strategies for Managing Them
These questions here are quite general; in reality I will try to adapt them in a way that builds on understanding from previous interviews to them make them more specific.
- Which relationships have been most important for your life in London?
- Who has been most supportive?
- In what ways have you felt that support?
- What kind of support has been most important for you?
- Who do you feel could be more supportive?
- How could they demonstrate that support?
- Have you tried to address this in some way?
- Who is it most important for you to show support for?
- How have tried to show this support?
Interview Guide – Migrants in London

Introduction

Study Information/Informed Consent

• Explanation of study
  o Study looking at relationships of friends and family develop through keeping in touch after migration.
  o Collaboration, I’m interested in your views. And in talking about
  o Rationale is to provide your account to better understand theoretical aspects, and to help families’ better issues.
  o Your a participant, as am I, which means that I will present the findings to you and discussion any inclusion of material with you make sure your okay with that.
• Sign informed consent form

General Questions about pre-migration to England and Migration Experience

• Can you tell me about the period before you came to London? What made you decide to move to London?
• What did you think moving to London to be like?
• How has your actual experience been?
• Can you describe the role your friends and family played in the decision?

Relationship Maps

Map Questions

• Please draw a map that represents your relationships at present
• Get an idea of who keeps in touch and to what extent. Make sure to get people who are important but who keep in touch to different degrees.

Individual Relationships

• Questions about how it has changed, were people always this close, or was it different. Major events in relationships
• Can you tell me a bit about the history of each of these relationships?
• How would describe the importance of each family relationship? Have you been closer to some more than others?
• What qualities did each friendship have that you appreciated? What do they lack?
• Of all these people, whom would you call in the case of an emergency, why?

Dynamics Between Relationships

• How would describe the relationships between these people? What roles did they play?
• How do you fit into this?
Figure Six
How is togetherness, as a mobile sociality, constituted from the manner in which migrants and friend and family utilize ICT and VFR practices for maintain relationships

1. Understand who participates in practices of a mobile sociality and who does not.
2. Understand how participation in a mobile sociality changes in different contexts of the
lifecourse.
3. Understand how VFR and ICT practices are used to condition relationships.
4. Understand if and how motivations for VFR and ICT practices are generated from normative structures underpinned by notions of gender and imaginations of the life course.
5. Understand how relationships mediate migration and generate new trajectories of the future through tensions of moral cultural norms and market economies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Themes</th>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Initial Adaptation to tech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mothers had to learn technology, had difficulty learning tech, used husbands/children to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some Friends, siblings had difficulty with Tech, mostly related to non exposure because of work status, use tech less often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of tech</td>
<td>Many friends and siblings had previous use of tech, often related to work, personal interest, or parallel mobilities, and had no problem using it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Even if no difficulties with tech, creating time was a common difficulty (except for with moms).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mothers responsible for children well being are “anxious,” need to check everything is okay. Use combinations of tech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Migrants without children: contact with mom too much, but tech used as a means to “keep her calm.” Important in different contexts of migration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Migrants without children: tech means for mothers to offer emotional support, advice on major events like buying a house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Migrants with children: tech means for children to stay connected to grandma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not enough Skype contact with friends, often sporadic, used to catch up between whatsapp chats or visits for longer conversations or moments of emotional support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends use whatsapp for playful means of keeping touch, staying connected. None invasive, but does require an obligation to respond with a “reasonable time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Siblings parallel friends: regular Skype use “unnecessary” use of whatsapp better for fun non-invasive interaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong to desire to use tech to constitute a aunt/uncle identity (both for those in Italy and those in London)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digital contact leads to visits (clearest with grandparents), but direction and frequency depends on individual relationship, life course of each member of the network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inability to create lived memory with tech, too much time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
without visits leads to life courses being out of sync, weakening of ties.
Friendships who experienced more difficulty with tech can lead to more emphasis on visits from migrants
If there are no visits to London, there are a lack of familiarity, lived memory, with new life London, leads to unbalanced relationships. Tech becomes tilted towards Italy. Difficulty using tech equates to perceptions that are relationships blocked, ease of tech that relationships are growing.
Inability to relate in depth or discuss serious topics (with friends), physical visits required filling that gap.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visits</th>
<th>Return (multi-local)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visits to London</td>
<td>Aggregating relationships: different friend networks, combining friends and family encounters. (also acts as relationship filtering process)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need to connect personal histories through bringing new friends or romantic relationships home. (done as a leisure practice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fulfill obligation to visit while doing holiday (for those with children, childcare is expected to assist with this)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitates in-direct communication. Visits are intense, need to be carefully organized, obligation to see everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fulfill desire/expectations related being aunt/uncle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mother’s are willing to overcome discomfort with travel to see children are okay in new context.
Aggregating relationships, both family and friendships with spouses/partners and life with children
Initially there is ambiguity over visits for tourism or emotional support early in migration, expressed differently with different members of networks (for mothers is always about support)
Initially with family, expectation for family to demonstrate respect for migrant personal independence
Expectation for both friends and family to gain familiarly for new surroundings through embodied encounters, leisure practices
Fulfill desire/expectations related being aunt/uncle
Family need to visit London fades due to care of other family members, perception return visits more important (for those without children)
With friends, expectation to visit fades with childbirth or depends on relationship with spouse
| Parallel migrations (international & domestic) | With family: migrants expect mothers to demonstrate respect for authority as new parents
From mothers: Expectation for recognition for right to be grandmother
Face to face encounters essential to connect trajectories of life course (that happens through combination of leisure and everyday practices)
Essential to create depth of relationships and provide emotional support. |
| --- |
| Contributes to perceived ease in connecting lives during visits and digital communication
Return visits often organized in sync.
Difficulty with previous migrations contributes to difficulty in maintaining relations in current migration.
Contributes to a weakening of relationships (family and friends), especially when there are no visits between migration contexts. |
| Blurring/reinforcement of kinship and friendship Blurred | Histories of losing touch, shifting importance of group members based on context of lifecourse.
Both viewed as older relationships that posses deeper knowledge of self and thus trust.
Indirect communication important for group function
Aggregating relationships during visits, re-forming of personal communities confirms heightened importance of friends in parallel to family.
Meaning of siblings and friends paralleled in use of tech, roles during visits home, expectation to visit London and function of relationships.
Erosion of mother authority that emerges in childcare, to lesser extent fathers, democratization of relationship with daughters that can mirror friendship.
Erosion of kin authority through children hiding potentially contentious problems or major decisions until they have been resolved, through tech and during visits. |
| Separate | Family a duty, can’t talk about everything, friends know the real you.
Aggregating relationships during visits, friends important, but parents can retain importance in hierarchy.
Parental authority reproduced in expectations with use of tech, direction of visits, roles and organization during return visits.
Expectation for financial support from parents with |
migration and housing. Expectation for childcare with grandmothers, not friends. Augmenting of kin authority through tech, parents can become further involved in children lives after migration. During visits, childcare with family equates to loss of the need to host while friends always require hosting.

| Potential future mobility/fixity | To be completed upon further analysis  
Involves balancing visits and tech  
Involves syncing, hoping to sync life courses. |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Migration as process            | Migration motivated by personal growth in relation to employment, growth in romantic relationships, desire for independence.  
Independence and personal growth in tension with expectation for strengthening older ties and using ties for support with migration (spurred further by the birth of a child).  
New relationships contribute to perceptions of permanence  
Perceived stability in migration leads to initial/further visits and adaptation to digital communication  
Perceived stability in migration leads to less visits in both directions.  
(There is a lot to analyze here about how migration is legitimized in different ways across networks, how this creates (im)mobilities of keeping in touch related to life stage, and different meanings of friends and family, that I haven’t done yet) |

Notes on Gender: Gender in relation to friends is clear in some cases but not in others. Also in one family the father keeps in touch more with tech, the mother no, but the meaning of her keeping in touch is the same with other families, the “need to check everything is okay.”

**Figure Eight**
### Desires and Fantasies for Togetherness: Physical and Digital VR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fantasies for Togetherness</th>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Digital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fantasy 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fantasy 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Notes

- Highlighted in blue: Those that are both physical and digital in nature.
- Highlighted in green: Those that are primarily physical in nature.
- Highlighted in orange: Those that are primarily digital in nature.

*How to integrate VR for enhancing social connections and experiences.*
Figure Nine (original plan for fieldwork)