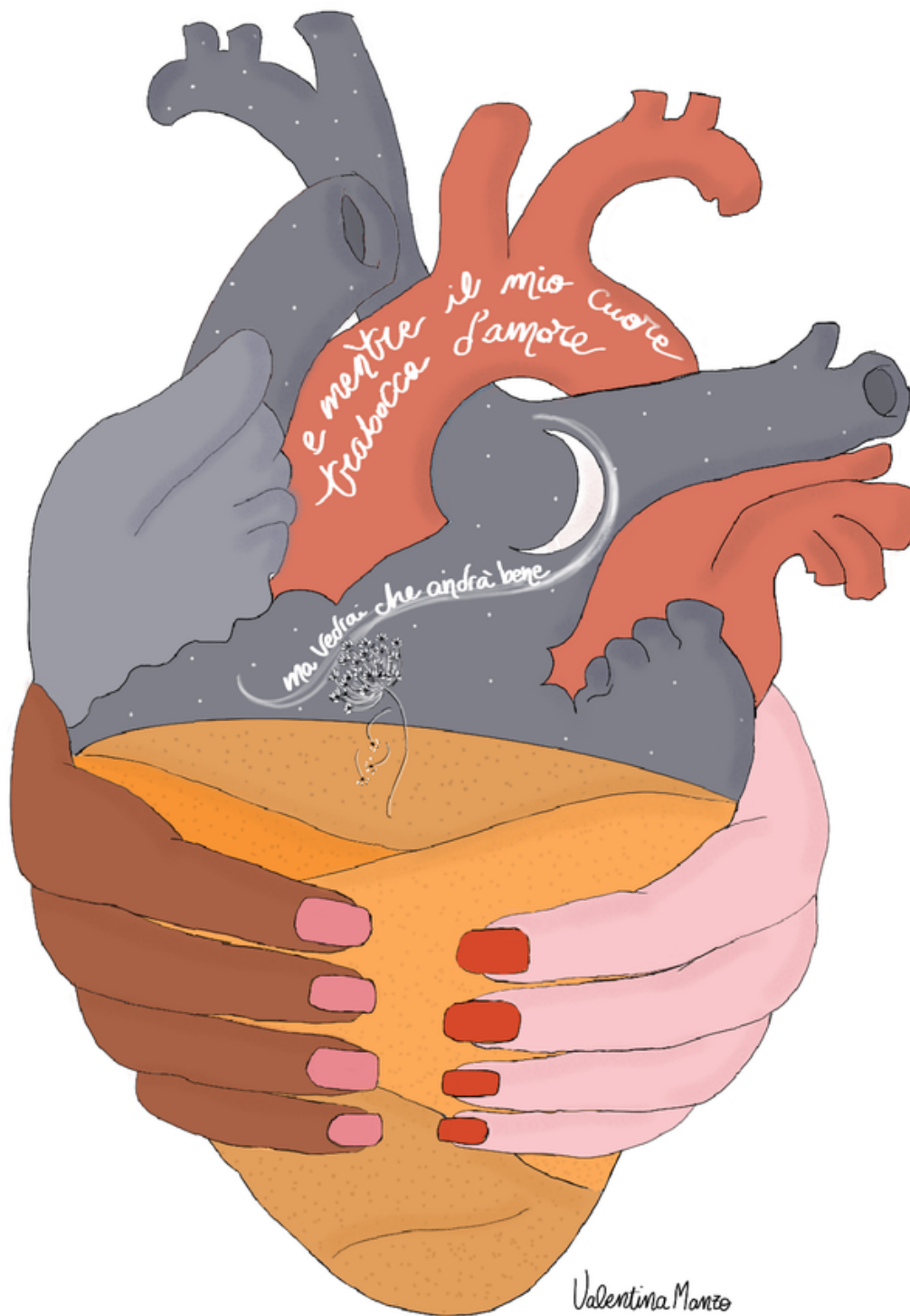


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Love in a Diverse City

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[https://undefined/media/images/Manzo_Figure_1_wbg.original.png]

Figure 1. Love in a Diverse City.

Image: Valentina Manzo

One of the most profound effects of globalization is that people from everywhere are falling in love with people from everywhere else. Increasing migration worldwide has facilitated the unions of people from different countries, religions, ethnicities and, presumably, cultural backgrounds.

Particularly in urban areas of super-diversity, there is a growing likelihood that multiple and overlapping forms of mixedness will characterize many romantic relationships and it may be that while some ethnocultural boundaries and negative attitudes will remain shaped by societal structures, others will become more blurred and of diminishing social significance (Song 2016 [<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796816638399>]).

The research "*Love at the time of Globalization: affective relationships as practices of everyday multiculturalism*" that I conducted in Milan, examined how romantic relationships between native majorities and second-generation minorities are experienced and performed among young adults in 2018-20. Such unions are often celebrated as a sign of integration; however, the classic assimilation theory no longer suffices in tackling the growth of large cities, which are witnessing unprecedented levels of diversity. It's likely, therefore, that global inequalities have made their way into the interior of family life, more visible and maybe replicated, as the inequalities of world relationships have names and faces that interact with the dynamics of intimate ones.

Drawing from Mitchell et al [<https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/participatory-visual-methodologies/book248779>]. (2017), I engaged participants in reworking and rethinking their family photographs to contest or re-position the content or messages in them, working with memories in the context of personal and social critique. The use of family photography could be seen as a practice for a mixed couple that constitutes social relations and identities, rather than as a type of image; they are instead 'compressed performances' (Pinney 2004 [<https://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/P/b03536077.html>]).

Transnational wedding(s)

Eleonora - Milanese, with an Italian family background - is married to Stefano - born in Italy to a Venetian father and a mother that migrated from the Indian community of Singapore; they are both 32 years old and don't have children. For their family albums, they chose two photographs of their weddings: a plural ritual celebrated both in Italy and in Singapore as "an opportunity to include a boundless family" - Stefano explained - from both places (figure 2).



[https://undefined/media/images/Manzo_Figure_2a.original.jpg]



[https://undefined/media/images/Manzo_Figure_2b.original.jpg]

Figure 2. The Wedding(s)

Marriage, like important rites of passage, constitutes rituals that produce and re-produce tradition, family and community. In the context of second-generations, Stefano's cross-cultural capacities are acquired by Eleonora through the romantic relationship, and reworked in the form of hybrid cultural practices, as they exemplified in the celebrations for their wedding. These are manifestations of transnational affects, whose corporeal palpability (Wise and Velayutham 2008 [<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830701708718>]) embeds these emotions into family members, allowing them to travel across distance and time. These relationships may represent a 'quiet revolution' that holds for re-envisioning people's idea of 'us and them', challenging what it means to inhabit multiculturalism in our everyday lives (Colombo and Semi 2007 [<https://www.francoangeli.it/ricerca>]

/scheda_libro.aspx?CodiceLibro=1144.37]). But how are people inside a family to withstand, negotiate and survive pressures that separate whole worlds from one another?

Intergenerational conflicts

Partners of mixed couples both suffer social discrimination regarding the crossing of ethnocultural borders, particularly from their respective family members – a rejection that is based on negative stereotypes and preconceptions linked to the partner's origin, phenotype or ethnocultural characteristics such as religion, in intersection with gender (Rodríguez-García et al. 2016 [<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796816638404>]). However, family opposition to mixing sometimes decreases over time, as in the case of Jada's Chinese parents, that gradually showed a certain acceptance of the situation when a male first grandchild arrived: Andrea.

Jada is 35 years old, was born in China and at the age of three her parents took her to Italy, to Milan. Her husband is called Diego and together they told me that for a long time they only relied on his Neapolitan family because, as a non-Chinese person, Diego was not welcomed by her parents. In 2013, Diego asked her to marry him while on vacation in Bordighera - on the seaside of Liguria - at the apartment loaned by Jada's best friend. They married in 2014 and Andrea was born in 2016. The photo in figure 3, depicting an intimate family portrait in their bedroom, was taken right in that apartment when Andrea was just 5 months old. They call it "the house of love" because, although not their property, it is a place that held many happy moments.



[https://undefined/media/images/Manzo_Figure_3_censored.original.jpg]

Figure 3. The house of love.

Through my method of engaging mixed couples in this deliberate the photographs they had already produced, we collaboratively created and participated in a reflection of multisensory experience of their intercultural love, as visual and haptic encounters, memorialization of the past, projections of a desired future and performances that constituted kinship, normalizing discourses, and counter-discourses.

Building love, together

The collaborative construction of a family album represents a great conceptual machine, which through the narration of "photographic moments" produces relationships, and inscribes aspirations and bonds.

Paolina and Fabrizio are the "youngest" couple I met. They have been together for less than three years and, in September 2019 they moved in together. She is 34 years old with an Egyptian father and Italian mother, from Molise. He is 31, has done a thousand odd jobs and comes from a very stigmatized neighborhood on the northern city periphery. Since the beginning of their story, Fabrizio has experiences various prejudices from her friends, because of his supposed "reputation" and (modest) position in the social hierarchy. This attempt to discredit him in her eyes has actually increased Paolina's desire to know him better and pursue their love story. Through discussing their photographs with me, the couple reflected more on the subtle dynamics of class discrimination and cultural marginalization, rather than the racialised elements of their relationship. The former factors, they felt, were the source of Fabrizio's experiences of discrimination.

In fact, in reworking their family album, they decided "to begin from the end" – Paolina explained – a couple selfie taken before the opening of Fabrizio's gym in September 2019 (figure 4), a project that Paolina strongly supported, for example by moving in with him into a home nearby the gym. The line between mutual support and individual aspirations can be thin, as Paolina explained: "for me it means having put a first brick, having really built something together, the beginning of something new! I saw, let's say, something that would do him good in this project" (Paolina, interview, 1/2/2020).



[https://undefined/media/images/Manzo_Figure_4.original.jpg]

Cities are roiling maelstroms of affect, love styles and spatially contextualized romantic emotions. Mixed couples and their intimate lives can be seen as “world families”: love relationships and other forms of relationship between people living in, or coming from, different countries or continents: they are the focal point at which the different aspects of the globalized world literally become embodied (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2013 [<https://politybooks.com/bookdetail/?isbn=9780745661803>]). They embed the macro socio-demographic and structural changes with the micro affective daily family contexts and the transformations of identity. Above all, these relationships are a laboratory in which to observe the effects of everyday multiculturalism in our societies: a challenge that brings us into the core of intercultural practices, parenting and a new generation of children with multiple identities. The experience of love in a diverse city is one type of embodiment of resistance against the state’s biopolitical power to control people and represents a space of intimate citizenship.

Illustration by Valentina Manzo, whose work can be viewed on Instagram [<https://www.instagram.com/valenten94/>].

About the author

Lidia Katia C. Manzo

Lidia K.C. Manzo has recently completed a research project for the Alsos Foundation at Milan University's Department of Social and Political Sciences. She is interested in the application of ethnography and visual methods in critical urban cultural studies to reinforce our knowledge of how discrimination, segregation and hegemony work spatially.

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