



Islam in México: Love and Mobility

Islã no México: Amor e Mobilidade

Islam en México: Amor y Movilidad

Arely Medina¹

Samanta Levy

Alejandra Sotamayor²

DOI: 10.5752/P.1809-6182.2024v21n2p25-32

ABSTRACT

This article explores, from a transnational perspective, how Islam is mobilized through emotional and intimate relationships. Specifically, it examines the trajectories, experiences, and migratory practices of Muslims in Mexico, focusing on love, dating, and marriage. By analyzing these dynamics, the study sheds light on the intersection of religion, affective ties, and mobility. It also considers how religious identity is shaped through transnational connections and intimate relationships, contributing to broader discussions on transnational Islam, migration, and identity formation. By examining these personal and social dimensions, the article provides insights into the lived experiences of Muslims navigating faith and relationships across borders.

Keywords: *Islam, love, transnational*

RESUMO

Este artigo explora, a partir de uma perspectiva transnacional, como o Islã é mobilizado por meio de relações emocionais e íntimas. Especificamente, examina as trajetórias, experiências e práticas migratórias de muçulmanos no México, com foco no amor, namoro e casamento. Ao analisar essas dinâmicas, o estudo ilumina a interseção entre religião, laços afetivos e mobilidade. Também considera como a identidade religiosa é moldada por conexões transnacionais e relações íntimas, contribuindo para debates mais amplos sobre Islã transnacional, migração e formação identitária. Ao abordar essas dimensões pessoais e sociais, o artigo oferece insights sobre as experiências vividas por muçulmanos que navegam entre fé e relações além das fronteiras.

Palavras-chave: *Islã, amor, transnacionalismo*

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora, desde una perspectiva transnacional, cómo el Islam se moviliza a través de relaciones emocionales e íntimas. Específicamente, examina las trayectorias, experiencias y prácticas migratorias de musulmanes en México, centrándose en el amor, el noviazgo y el matrimonio. Al analizar estas dinámicas, el estudio ilumina la intersección entre religión, vínculos afectivos y movilidad. También considera cómo la identidad religiosa se configura a través de conexiones transnacionales y relaciones íntimas,

¹ Doctora en Ciencias Sociales, El Colegio de Jalisco

² Doctora en Historia, CIESAS-Peninsular

contribuyendo a debates más amplios sobre el Islam transnacional, la migración y la formación identitaria. Al abordar estas dimensiones personales y sociales, el artículo ofrece perspectivas sobre las experiencias vividas por musulmanes que navegan entre la fe y las relaciones más allá de las fronteras.

Palabras clave: *Islam, amor, transnacionalismo*

Introduction

The study of Islamic communities in Mexico has enabled us to see dynamics of the Islam's transnationalization process (Medina, 2019) at its global scale as well as at a local one with its particularities. Islam's transnationality is the result of the religious system's high mobility, which is encouraged by different actors who can be Islamic or not, who can be part of institutional Islam or not. In this process, Islam is delocalized, transterritorialized and relocated in various ways (Capone; André, 2012). We chose the transnationalism focus, which enables us to get out from the methodological nationalism and understand the dynamics that run through geographical, political and hegemonic borders. Cultures, ideologies, systems, among them the religious, which can be revitalized through channels, flows and agents that mobilize them. With this perspective, we want to present, in this work, one of the mobility forms of Islam in Mexico through affective relationships, which generally result in marriage.

These dynamics are enrolled in the process of geographies of love or desire (Roca, 2011), migration for love (Roca, 2007), the transnationalization of intimacy (King, 2002), or transnational courtship (Bodoque; Soronellas, 2010). Roca Girona (2007, 2011) observes that these dynamics started in 1980 with the mobilization of Filipina girlfriends or women from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to the United States of America, and later, with

marital agencies that facilitate the search for a partner on the internet, which originated the transnational courtship and marriage phenomenon. This dynamic has increased and has taken on different forms that are in accordance with the social networks' update and the move from computers to mobile phones, thus, the love apps appear to create an affective market: "they create mobile apps that are directly from the phone, and they work as 'sexual-loving delivery'" (Bonavitta, 2015). Among the Muslims, this has taken as well to the creation of social media groups (Pasqualin; Campos Barbosa, 2016), platforms, websites, and dating apps with Islamic tone, such as Muslima, Muzz –the Tinder for Muslims–, Musmeet, Muslim Dates, Muslim Dating, BuzzArab, Arablounde, or Zawajara: Islamic Marriage, Single Muslim, Muzwaj, Muslim Mingle: Dating and Chat, Sunna Match, Islam et Mariage, Mariage Halal et Recontres, among others, which has opened a marital or intimacy market for a specific consumer society.

With this context is that we seek to initiate a reflection that focuses on the forms or types of forming marriages through the use of digital technologies and migration. Hence we anticipate that the affective experiences of Muslim migrants in Mexico are not foreign to the presence of virtuality or the use of these apps as a medium for marriage seeking, and that this involves other variables such as migration and conversion. The affective relationships that involve transnational dating or transnationali-

zation of intimacy where we can locate love, which entail love between Muslims, either converts or migrant origin in Mexico, opens a line of research to comprehend some ways in how Islam mobilizes, which is the purpose of the article, but also how these relationships allow the generation or make visible cultural expressions on the rules of love and Gender-related marital relationships, and around Islam in a highly Christian context with a Catholic majority.

The data presented here are the result of monitoring two Muslim groups. On one hand, the Muslims from Guadalajara³, and on the other, the Ahmadi Muslim Community⁴. The tracking consisted of field work and interviews, but we also backed up these experiences with a literature review about Islam in Mexico, and retrieved data that show love, courtship, and marriage experiences. Derived from it, we propose methodologically a typology, according to the idea of Weberian ideal types (Weber, 1984) to describe the different ways of how the affective relationships are connected to Islam and its mobility, in which the migration is an important variable. With a comparative analysis, we seek to explain and inform about the particularities that the affective relationships have in Guadalajara and with the Ahmadi Movement.

We rely on the idea that this type of emotional and loving relationships, especially marriage, should not be comprehended only as a religious commandment, decision-making linked to needs, desires, aspirations always plays important roles in the agency of each involved,

so religion is not always an imperative. The proposal is that these relationships also respond to the global dynamics related to cultural industries that create social imaginaries for the case of women converted to Islam or Mexican Muslims; as happened in the exploration of Medina (2014) with the construction of religious identities and the case of Islamic marriages in Brazil (Pasqualin; Campos Barbosa, 2016), and with the so called migration for love, which, at the same time, is connected, for the case of migrant men, to political and economical situations of their countries. We want to highlight that the processes, even though they involve Islam and mobility, are not homogenous. Every emotional and loving relationship is a trajectory that plays differently with the religion, love, and migration variables, to mention those that are reiterative. With the comparative analysis, we explain how an institutionalized religious practice creates specific types of marriage, whereas an Islam exposed to deinstitutionalization allow the generation and combination of various types of affective relationships.

Islam in Mexico: the community from Guadalajara and the Ahmadi Muslim Community

The contemporary existence of Islam in Mexico, which spans from 1990 to this day (Medina, 2019), has shown an increase of Muslims bot migrant origin and converts, e.g., in 2010 the Census of Population and Housing identified 3,760 Muslims in the country, of which 2,368 are men and 1,392 are women (INEGI, 2010). In 2020, an increment was reported with a total of 7,982 Muslims, of which 4,713 are men and 3,269 are women (INEGI,

³ The Muslims in Guadalajara are represented by two Sunni mosques, hence, for the purpose of this work, they will be taken as only one group.

⁴ The Ahmadi Muslim Community is present in Mérida, Mexico City, Querétaro and Chiapas. In this work, they are considered as Muslims because they identify as that. It is not our goal to debate whether or not they are Muslims.

2020). Based on our field work, we know that from that population, the majority are Mexican converts, while the minority consists of Arab, Turkish, and Pakistani migrants.

Islam's presence is very diverse when it comes to create community, enroll to some orthodoxy or doctrine, connect to the international da'wah, and practice. Among the doctrine's diversity, there are Sunni, Shiite, Sufi, Ahmadi, and Salafi communities, and many of them are related to international proselytism of diverse types. Among the international proselytism of a more vertical character are a couple of Islamic organizations that establish as community in some region of the country, introducing a type of practice, such as the Murabitun World Movement in Chiapas in 1998, and the Ahmadi Muslim Community, installed in Merida in 2014, that later spread to Mexico City and Querétaro in 2017, and to Chiapas in 2018.

As in the case of Ahmadi, we observe that its installation in Mexico obeys to the international proselytism dynamic that establishes a hierarchical organization as well as endogamous through the preservation of marriages among high-class Pakistani people. The men in this marriage become missionaries with the goal of maintaining the communication, integration and economic support between the caliph in England and the sees in different countries where converts live. An important part of their system, conservation of the practice and institutional prevalence to an international level, is the marriage: endogamous for Pakistanis, and for the women converts with a Pakistani or between converts. These mechanisms highlight the hierarchy and power relations within the community that are accompanied by ethnic

identity for Pakistanis, and the perception of the convert as another, which permeates the ways of institutionalizing marriage.

Marriage has its own institutional process through the matrimonial service, *Rishta Nata*. This is attended by a volunteer parishioner, who is in charge of searching potential prospects, so the marriage can be achieved, this way an Ahmadi family and the movement's growth is guaranteed. However, this does not weaken the converts' diligence to do their own searching, for example, in dating apps or any other social networks that not only involve the Ahmadi, but Muslims of other currents as well.

Contrary to this type of organization, the Islamic community from Guadalajara, which started in 1993 with a migrant majority and a Sunni orientation, has developed under global dynamics, although they involve international da'wah, they have not been sustaining from it and, instead, the community has been self-managed. The converts' trajectories also show a diversity of religious and hybrid symbolic practices that are a reflection of Islam's deinstitutionalization dynamics. There is not a vertical organization established from just one orthodoxy, rather, the converts go through different Islamic spaces with a diverse offer. The internet has been a tool, a channel and an interaction and learning space that enables the building of emotional transnational relationships. It was through interactive platforms such as ICQ, Hi5, Facebook, and Instagram where Muslim women have established these relationships and even progress into marriage with migrant Muslims (Medina, 2014; Medina, 2020), but the same growth of the national community has allowed marriage between Mexican Muslims.

Types of Affective relationships and marriage in Islam

The emotional relationships that were detected in the literature review about Islam in Mexico has enabled us to show the wide range of affective relationships that involve Muslims, migrants or converts. This can be from a courtship, engagement or even marriage. Within this diversity, we propose ideal types that seek to show the complexity of affective relationships existing in every trajectory, where every exposed case succeeds in connecting with any other type.

- A. Marriage or the loving-affective relationship is a migration cause, meaning:
 1. There is a transnational courtship and an engagement between a Mexican Muslim, or not, and a Muslim with a foreign residency.
 2. The marriage is effected by a Mexican (whether Muslim or not) and a migrant, later, they migrate to live as a couple.
- B. Marriage is an effect of migration. Migration happens for non-affective causes, and, at the place of destination, Mexico, relationships are formed and marriage is achieved.
- C. Marriage as a conversion cause generally happens when non-Muslim women get married to a Muslim man, and as time goes by, they choose to convert to Islam and build an Islamic family.
 1. The conversion is given by the existence of an affective-loving relationship, which entails the idea of a future marriage with a Muslim man.
- D. Marriage as a conversion effect, converts throughout their Islamic practice will

integrate marriage as a pillar, this will lead them to consider it and then contract it to a migrant or a compatriot.

- E. Conversion and marriage as part of a ritual process to fulfill conversion. Islam's diffusion through proselytism has had an effect not only in a person's spiritual search, but it has achieved conversions of complete families, integrating, at the same time, the dynamics of an Islamic marriage.
- F. Muslim families' migration. This is common between the Turkish, Pakistani, and, especially, belonging members of the Ahmadi movement.
- G. Temporary marriage or *muta'ah*, is a marriage that presets its duration and, most of the time, its only goal is the sexual pleasure.

From these ideal types, we can see how religious mobility is connected to the consolidation of affective relationships, where, mainly, marriage appears as a focal point. But we also want to show how Weber (1984) explains that within ideal types does not exist an ideal figure, but actions focused on goals and explanations within it, that open possibilities in connection ways and find crossings between them. The gathered experiences, mostly among Mexican converted women, imply several types of marriage, linked to their relation with the community and their personal trajectories, or ways of relating to otherness, gender and power relations as well.

For the case of the community from Guadalajara, we observe the existence of various types and crossings, what gives different forms of transnational love mobility:

Type A. Marriage or the affective relationship is the cause of migration. Ali, a Turkish; Fouad a Moroccan; Kadher and Assad, Egyptians, maintained transnational court-

ships from their countries. Fouad and Khader's fiancées traveled to their fiancés' countries to get married; the wives returned to Mexico to obtain a visa for them. Ali and Assad traveled to Mexico to get married. In all four cases, their wives have not converted to Islam, there was not an Islamic ritual, but only the civil one.

Type B. Marriage is an effect of migration. Sedar, a Turkish, and Haidar, a Syrian, arrived to Mexico because of work situations. Later, they married Catholic women who have chosen not to convert into Islam.

Type D. This is the most common case, since marriage is established as a religious pillar, in which the converts get to know each other previously, or meet at the communities and later get married. Rafael, the *imam*, and his wife met at the community, and they fulfilled the marriage ritual under the community customs.

Type E. Aisha explains marriage and conversion as part of a ritual process that completes the transition. She converted to Islam before her partner, with whom she had a daughter, in her second pregnancy, her partner decided to convert to Islam, and, at that moment, the community encouraged them to realize the Islamic marriage.

Type F. Muslim families' migration. Metin and Sandal are both Turkish men who migrated to Mexico because of labor motives. Already settled in the country, they went back to Turkey to get married, and brought their wives with them. Sandal's children were born in Mexico, and now they have the Mexican residence. This type of dynamic creates culturally endogenous families.

Those marriages in which crossings of one or more several types of Islamic marriages have also been registered, for example: D, A and B Crossing. The case of a Mexican woman who

converted to Islam through the internet. Social media enabled her to have a long distance relationship, one that didn't succeed. Later, she joined the community where she met an Indian migrant, this man belongs to type B, because his staying in Mexico was because of his job. After they met, they decided to get married in Mexico where they lived for a few years, and then, had children. During lockdown, they went back as a family to India, and after a long period of time as a couple, the husband divorced her islamically, and she returned to Mexico without her children

Case D, A, E. Prior to her conversion, Habibah was married to a Catholic man, with whom she had two daughters. Her partner represents Type E, where his conversion led to the whole family's conversion. However, Habibah did not feel that the conversion was authentic, so she got divorced. She began the transnational affective search (Medina, 2020) and managed to travel to Egypt with hopes of getting married, but not fully convinced, she returned to Mexico. In the local community, she met a convert with whom she got married, and now they live as a couple with their children following Islamic dynamics.

In the Ahmadi case, few marriage experiences are presented, in which we identified two types:

Type A. Marriage or affective-loving relationship as cause of migration. María and Guadalupe, before their conversion and as a part of their Islamic faith's integration, got married to foreign believers who they met through internet platforms. Maria, through *Rishta Nata Canada*, was helped by her *walli* and the platform's mediator; her marriage was celebrated with an Ahmadi of Pakistani descent and Canadian citizenship, where she emigrated to.

And Guadalupe, through a dating app, managed to marry a Sunni Muslim from Tunisia, the city where she currently resides.

Type D. Marriage as a conversion's consequence. It is about a couple of adults from Yucatán that converted on the first weeks of the establishment of the Ahmadi community in Mérida, Yucatán in 2014, and three years later, in 2017, they strengthened their relationship by getting civilly married to consolidate their integration in the community.

A couple of experiences where the marriage process was long and complicated were also registered, thus, some complex typologies crossings were identified:

Case C, D, A and B. Airam, is a Mexican woman who converted to Islam during a virtual courtship that ended, after which she continued with her Islamic practice, aware of her desire for an Islamic marriage. Subsequently, she reactivated her profiles on Muzz and Rishta Nata Global, met a suitor and migrated with the intention of getting married, however, the marriage did not materialize. She decided to stay in the UK working and later met her current Muslim husband of Pakistani descent on the Muzmatch app, with whom they immediately got married through the Rishta Nata UK platform.

Cases D and A. A convert, aware of the need for marriage as a key part of her Islamic practice, consolidated a transnational marriage through the Rishta Nata Canada platform, migrating to the suitor's country to celebrate the marriage and lead her life as a couple.

Final considerations

Marriage because of migration is not a recent dynamic, it has been present in classic migrations. What we currently witness is the

reformulation of a market of marriage or courtship that broadens the possibilities of transnational affective interactions. The variable religion and migration in this context mediated by social networks that streamline communication has made the phenomenon of migration for love extended to sectors that were previously more traditional, such as Islam. Each ideal type considered, and the cases presented allow us to illustrate the mobility route, objective of this work, but we do not want to simplify the history of each couple, nor simplify the processes of socio-cultural integration in Mexico, including gender and power relations in them. The analysis of Islamic marriage we made with two community cases reflects how the religion and migration variables link together, and how these dynamics are connected to the transnationalization process and the continuation of Islam in Mexico.

We see how a community with a hierarchical and endogamous organization foster, mainly, a pair of types that are also well-approved, while if it goes out of the institutionalized practice, some other types are generated. These other types are very similar to the ones observed in the case of Guadalajara, where individual experiences not managed from the Islamic community bring within more diversity.

We observe that in both cases, even if some types coincide, there are variations. For example, in Type A, in the case of Guadalajara, migration is mainly masculine, where the man leaves his country of origin to go to Mexico. While in the Ahmadi case, the Mexican woman migrates to her husband's country because Ahmadi-Pakistani migration concentrates in Germany, England, Canada, and the United States of America, hence why the presence of Ahmadi migrants belongs to missionary fami-

lies and the missions in Latin America are done by converts only.

Finally, the classification of these affective relationships that is offered here has allowed us to appreciate that there is not just one cause that favors courtships or marriages, but several patterns that even are a sum of various types, also exist.

Bibliography

BODOQUE, Yolanda y SORONELLAS, Montserrat. Parejas en el espacio transnacional: Los proyectos de mujeres que emigran por motivos conyugales. **Migraciones Internacionales**, vol. 5, núm. 3, enero-junio, 2010. Disponible en: <https://migracionesinternacionales.colef.mx/index.php/migracionesinternacionales/article/view/1082>

BONAVITTA, Paola. El amor en los tiempos de Tinder. **Cultura y Representaciones Sociales**, año 10, núm. 19, septiembre, 2015. Disponible en: <https://www.scielo.org.mx/pdf/crs/v10n19/v10n19a9.pdf>

CAPONE, Stefania & ANDRÉ, Mary. Las translógicas de una globalización religiosa a la inversa. En ARGYRIADIS, Kali, CAPONE, Stefania, DE LA TORRE, Renée, ANDRÉ, Mary y PALOMAR, Verea (coords). **En sentido contrario**. Transnacionalización de religiones africanas y latinoamericanas. México: CIESAS-Academia/L'Harmattan-Institut de Recherche Pour le Développement-Publicaciones de la Casa Chata, 2012, p.27-46.

INEGI. **Subsistema de Información Demográfica y Social**. 2020 Disponible en: <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/ccpv/2020/>

INEGI. **Subsistema de Información Demográfica y Social**. 2010 Disponible en: <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/ccpv/2010/>

KING, Russell. Towards a new map of European migration. **International Journal of Population Geography**, vol. 8, no.

2, 2002. Disponible en: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/ijpg.246>

MEDINA, Arely. Migración por matrimonio islámico: de las primeras migraciones árabes y turcas a las contemporáneas. **Revista Estudios Jaliscienses**, núm. 121, El Colegio de Jalisco, agosto, 2020. Disponible en: <https://www.estudiosjaliscienses.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/n%C3%BAm.-121-Migraci%C3%B3n-por-matrimonio-isl%C3%A1mico.pdf>

MEDINA, Arely. El islam en México. Revisión histórica de su inserción al escenario religioso mexicano. **Vuelo libre. Revista de historia**, no. 5, 2019. Disponible en: http://www.vuelolibre.revistadehistoria.cucsh.udg.mx/sites/default/files/2_el_islam_en_mexico_revision_historica_de_su_insercion_al_escenario_religioso_mexicano.pdf

MEDINA, Arely. **Islam en Guadalajara. Identidad y relocalización**. Jalisco: El Colegio de Jalisco, 2014.

PASQUALIN, Flávia Andréa, & CAMPOS Barbosa, Franciros. Casamento Intercultural Islámico: Quando a internet faz parte da relação. **Revista Último Andar**, n. 29, Brasil, 2016. Disponible en: <https://revistas.pucsp.br/index.php/ultimoandar/article/view/31310/21809>

ROCA, Jordi. Amores globales, noviazgo transnacionales. La búsqueda virtual de pareja mixta por parte de hombres españoles. **Revista de Antropología Social**, vol. 20, Madrid, 2011. Disponible en: <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/838/83821273010.pdf>

ROCA, Jordi. **Amor importado, migrantes por amor**: la constitución de parejas entre españoles y mujeres de América Latina y Europa del Este en el marco de la transformación actual del sistema de género en España. Proyectos de Investigación Científica y Desarrollo Tecnológico, 2007. Disponible en: <https://www.inmujeres.gob.es/areasTematicas/estudios/estudioslinea2009/docs/766Amorimportado.pdf>

ROCA, Jordi. Migrantes por amor. La búsqueda y formación de parejas transnacionales. **AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana**, vol. 2, no. 3, septiembre-diciembre, 2007a. Disponible en: <https://aries.aibr.org/storage/antropologia/02v03/articulos/020301.pdf>

WEBER, Max. **Ensayos metodológicos**. Madrid: Península, 1984.