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Infrastructures of Migrant Intimacies

Co-Becoming with Housing, People, and Places

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how housing, people and places function as infrastructures in discussions of migrant intimacies. Intimacy is here understood both as relations between humans and as co-becomings with the more-than-human. The concept of co-becoming refers to the ontological thinking that all beings, materialities, places and affects are constituted through relations that are constantly regenerated. Infrastructures are understood not as prefigured objects or structures but as relational, dynamic patterns. Drawing on post-humanist queer theory, the paper develops the notion of the infrastructure of migrant intimacies to portray migrant relations in ways that move beyond normative categories of intimacy. The article draws on a theory-driven analysis of interviews with European Union (EU) and non-EU migrants working in low-paid jobs in Finland. The article addresses the following question: how do human and more-than-human infrastructures converge as intimacies in migrants' accounts? By focusing on infrastructures, the article offers a nuanced interpretation of how migrant intimacies emerge in the context of precarity as creative, temporary and ambivalent co-becomings that do not easily align with white (hetero)normative notions of intimacy or with some popular queer understandings of intimacy.

Keywords: co-becoming, intimacies, infrastructures, migration, queer

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> I have quite a nice place. An Estonian man bought the place and did all the renovations, and now everyone has their own room, it is me and a group of men from Estonia and Russia. It has been such a long time since I lived with men. It is better to live with men – less gossiping than with women. And the place is quite beautiful. […] Huge house, the men have their own floor and I have mine. […] We have our own garden. […] Many remain but many also leave, some have lost their jobs in Estonia. Someone's wife has found a new man, another stays a couple of months in Estonia, comes back to Finland and then goes back again. We have them all: electricians, a taxi driver, a removal man, a construction worker… and we also have our own house cat.

BY BEGINNING THIS article with Anita's description, I aim to shed light on the intimacies that emerge within a mesh of human and more-than-human settings. Anita, a 61-year-old woman from Estonia, had lived in Finland for over a year when I first met her. She had divorced her husband, and her children were adults by the time she moved to Finland to "start a new life". Having previously lived what was regarded as a normative lifestyle in Estonia, she found herself in a different position in Finland. When I met her, she was working as a cleaner – a job she had never held in Estonia. Anita's account suggests that living as a migrant in Finland can alter one's life experiences in various ways, especially regarding work and housing arrangements, compared with a former normative lifestyle.

Critical migration scholars have studied how economic flows of capital and labor utilize divisions based on gender, race, migrancy, juridical status and their intersections, and how these divisions create a precarious labor force (e.g., Wills et al. 2010; Könönen 2015; Maury 2022). Less studied, however, is how intimacies emerge in the lives of migrants working in precarious, low-paid, and temporary jobs. By investigating how intimacies emerge in the lives of twenty-five European Union (EU) and non-EU migrants who work in low-paid jobs, my aim is to provide a more nuanced understanding of the connection between precarity, migrancy, and intimacies. I apply several key concepts to this analysis:

intersectionality, infrastructure and intimacy. In this study, the term *migrant(s)* refers to a heterogeneous group of people who have migrated to Finland to work, study or join loved ones, most of whom are seeking a better life. However, a person with migrant status seldom refers to oneself as a *migrant*. My informants' legal statuses varied, particularly with regard to residency: while EU migrants enjoy free movement within the EU, non-EU migrants' lives are more constrained by the residence permit system. Most non-EU migrants in my sample were living in Finland on temporary residence permits, adding a level of precarity to their lives. In addition to their migrant status, gender, race and class shape the lives of migrants, creating intersectional differences. I view intersectional categories not as pregiven or stable but as social, affective and material processes that are actualized situationally and temporarily in the lives of migrants (Tiainen et al. 2020).

I view infrastructure as an affective, social, lively, material and economic collective web through which people, housing and places become interwoven. Seeing people as infrastructure means seeing them as part of a collective – namely, the technical, material, economic, and social webs that provide, sustain, and reproduce life in urban settings (Simone 2004, 2021). This dynamic understanding of infrastructure opens a perspective on the social reproduction of cities' infrastructural webs, which migrants become part of (Simone 2004, 2021). However, migrants, sexual minorities, and precarious workers are often excluded from urban development processes, making cities ever "more heteronormative, white, and family-oriented" (Sorainen 2015, 45). In response to such developments, where incomes, middle-class lifestyles, conventional intimate relationships, and housing intersect in exclusionary ways, migrants working in precarious jobs must devise creative solutions for living and coping in cities.

To explore how migrancy and precarious work shape new forms of intimacy, I developed a theoretical framework that I have dubbed *infrastructures of migrant intimacies*. I ask: how do human and more-than-human infrastructures converge as intimacies in migrants' accounts? The study contributes not only to critical migration studies but also to queer studies by demonstrating how intimacies emerge intersectionally as multiple, complex, processual co-becomings of human and more-than-human, encompassing both romantic and non-romantic relationships (e.g., Latimer & López Gómez 2019; Berlant 2000; Wilson 2012, 2016; Kolehmainen et al. 2021; Hammack et al. 2019; Kolehmainen & Juvonen 2018).

In the next section, I introduce the key theories that helped me to outline and process the data analysis. I then discuss the methods applied and present the research results. In the concluding section, I integrate my findings and reflect on their implications.

From a queer-theoretical understanding of intimacies to the infrastructures of migrant intimacies

In this section, I develop my theoretical framework, infrastructures of migrant intimacies, by drawing on queer theory and the infrastructural turn in studies of intimacy. I argue that in order to understand how intimacies emerge in the lives of migrants working in low-paid jobs and facing other precarious conditions, we need new conceptual tools.

Firstly, I draw on queer theory in several ways. Queer lenses enable us to examine intimacies beyond the dominant models of the heterosexual nuclear family and couple-normative relationships (Latimer & López Gómez 2019; Berlant 2000; Wilson 2012, 2016; Kolehmainen et al. 2021; Hammack et al. 2019; Kolehmainen & Juvonen 2018). At the same time, queer analysis provides tools to make visible the normative assumptions about intimacy that migrants may encounter in their new country. For example, as Salla Tuori (2009, 166) notes, in Finland the "immigrant family" is often portrayed as exaggeratedly heterosexual, which limits the ways we conceive of migrant families and intimacies. I apply a concept of intimacy that does not assume intimacy as pre-given or limited to relations between humans but instead views it as a queer socio-material relationship that emerges through various practices (Latimer & López Gómez 2019, 253). This approach, which I term *radical openness of intimacies and their becomings*, valorizes the doings, capacities and acts involved in the making of intimacies, as well as a "sense of the potency of 'intimacy' as unsettling, subversive and even dangerous" (Latimer & López Gómez 2019, 253; see also Kolehmainen et al. 2021, 2023).

Secondly, in developing my framework, I use the concept of *infrastructures of intimacies* as a bridge between queer studies and migration studies. I understand infrastructures not as prefigured objects but as dynamic patterns and movements that organize (intimate) life (e.g., Amin 2014; Berlant 2016; Wilson 2012, 2016; Star 1999). Although infrastructures are typically seen as invisible, Susan Leigh Star (1999, 380) points out that this assumption is called into question when we "examine situations of those who are not served by the particular infrastructure." I argue that migrants' accounts challenge the view of infrastructures as merely stable or passively invisible backdrops. In these accounts, infrastructures become active, visible and, indeed, intimate, as migrants' lives are infrastructurally rearranged in the new country. I further argue that migrants' lives become infrastructurally intensified as they plug into new places, housing and social networks. Drawing on Jasbir Puar's (2012) thinking about material objects, I approach infrastructures as "affective conductors" with the capacity to intensify relations between bodies, thereby producing various acts and emotions.

Thirdly, I discuss place, with reference not only to locations such as shopping malls but also to natural elements – including non-human features such as the sea – as infrastructures through which one experiences a new environment and forges connections. For instance, Bawaka Country et al. (2016) radically include places in co-becomings with humans, thereby challenging the limits of Western ontological understandings of place and space (Korjonen-Kuusipuro & Kuusisto 2019, 365). For Bawaka Country et al. (2016, 456), co-becoming denotes an ontology in which everything – beings, materialities and affects – is constituted through relationality in constant motion: places are active, dynamic and relational processes of co-becoming.

Finally, drawing on the work of Karen Barad, I explore how intimacies can be understood as the intra-action of human and more-than-human realities. Barad (2007, 2008) uses the term *intra-action* to challenge the assumption of pre-existing bodies that interact; instead, agency emerges as a dynamism of ongoing materializations involving various forces and entities intra-acting (Barad 2008, 325). Through this framework, I underscore that infrastructures do not shape intimacies in a priori or top-down manner; rather, infrastructures co-become as intimacies and as fields of power. This perspective highlights their human and more-than-human intra-actions with class, race and other forms of difference (Wilson 2016, 246, 276) – and, I propose, with their intersections as well.

To move beyond hierarchical binaries, such as human/non-human, in intersectional analyses, Milla Tiainen and colleagues (2020, 220) – drawing on new materialist thinking – suggest that by acknowledging the agential power of material objects in the actualization of intersectional differences, we can unlock alternative interpretations of differences, instead of taking categories and differences as given. In the following section, I discuss how I applied these concepts from new materialist and queer theories to analyze my data in ways that allow for open-ended interpretations of migrants' intimacies and their intersections.

Analyzing interviews through intra-activity

The data for this article were collected as part of a larger research project aimed at studying industrial citizenship and labor mobility among Estonian and Albanian workers in the EU.[1] While aligning my doctoral research with the project and conducting interviews with Estonian workers, I also interviewed non-EU and other EU migrants to study the intersections among precarious workers in the service sector.

This paper therefore draws on interviews with twenty-five foreign-born migrants, thirteen of whom I conducted follow-up interviews with two years after the initial interviews. The follow-up interviews provided a better understanding of changes in the informants' lives; however, in this article, I do not focus specifically on those changes. All but two interviews were conducted individually. On one occasion, two women were interviewed together, and one interview took the form of a group discussion with six men. I applied a semi-structured biographical interview method (Mrozowicki 2011) in all the interviews except the group discussion, where I used themes similar to those used in the individual interviews. The interviews varied in length from half an hour to two and a half hours. The first interviews took place in 2013–2014, with follow-ups in 2016. I conducted all the interviews myself, except for one that I conducted with two colleagues. Interviews were conducted in either Finnish or English, depending on the informant's language preference. Interview locations included cafeterias, shopping malls, universities, libraries, informants' workplace, and informants' homes. Three of the follow-up interviews were conducted by phone. All interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed, with interviewees anonymized and assigned pseudonyms.

The interviewees included ten men and fifteen women. The women were all from EU countries, primarily Estonia, with some from Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia, and Hungary. The men had migrated from countries outside the EU – Nepal, Ghana, India, Cameroon, Gambia, Nigeria, and Bangladesh – except for one who was from Estonia. The interviewees had first arrived in Finland between six months and ten years prior to the interviews. I contacted the informants through a Facebook group for Estonians living in Finland, a local trade union branch email list, and the snowball method. Most face-to-face interviews took place in the Helsinki metropolitan area, but some informants had also lived in other regions of Finland. Although the aim of the larger project, as described above, was to study migrant notions of citizenship and worker subjectivities, including trade union participation, the interview method allowed for much broader content, yielding data that covered many aspects of the informants' lives. In addition to the interviews, I kept a field diary in which I summarized the main points from each session. I also took notes on the interview location, setting, and the atmosphere and emotions that emerged during the process.

I began the interviews by asking informants to "tell me your life story". Any gaps in their stories were addressed with supplementary narrative questions (Mrozowicki 2011, 266). Participants were then invited to reflect in more detail their work experiences and migration histories.

This approach proved challenging in various ways. In some cases, the interviewee was insufficiently informed as to the nature of the interview; for example, one had scheduled too little time. Some participants may not have been accustomed to storytelling as an interview method or to sharing detailed accounts of their lives with a stranger, especially in a language that was not native to either the interviewee or the interviewer. In other cases, the interview situation and method required me to know how to ask the right questions, as not all questions had been predetermined: the intention was to follow interesting lines of inquiry as they arose during the conversation. Nonetheless, the method did produce interesting descriptions of migrants' lives entangled with housing arrangements, spaces, environments and people, such as co-workers and family members. I am mindful of the limitations of the data, since not all interviews produced vivid accounts of cohabitants, families, relationships or housing arrangements. Recognizing these limitations and the unique perspectives each interview offered, I did not want to focus exclusively on the similarities between the accounts but also sought to map the diverse ways in which migrant intimacies emerged.

Initially, I analyzed the data through the theme of housing. However, I began to notice that not all interviewees discussed meaningful relationships in relation to housing arrangements; there were also other trajectories, lurking and entangled in intimacies. I therefore adopted a different approach to the analysis. Rereading the interviews and my field diary with Barad's concept of intra-activity in mind, and considering environments, places and spaces through the lens of infrastructures of intimacies, I found certain elements starting to "make trouble," creating interesting pathways to an understanding of intimacies as they emerged in the lives of my research participants. The analysis can thus be described as a theory-driven close reading in the sense that the theoretical framework of infrastructures and queer intimacies opened new ways of looking at the data and its previous interpretations. Furthermore, this rereading evoked embodied, affective knowledge and memories of the interviews I had recorded in my research diary. I integrated these embodied and written notes into the analysis.

In addition to theoretical reading, I engaged with "materialist ontology" (MacLure 2013) in analyzing the data. In effect, I focused on moments when something peculiar, affective or troubling seemed to emerge from the data – what Maggie MacLure (2013, 661) describes as the "glowing" of the data. Thus, in reanalyzing the data, my aim was not to produce a strictly thematic or category-based coding but rather to pause and focus on these glowing aspects – such as "the scenery" or "the shopping mall" – and trace their loops and entanglements in relations to intimacies. Furthermore, by concentrating on selected accounts and narratives while outlining the results of my analysis, I found that I was better able to highlight the tensions, contradictions and ambivalences that (individual) biographical narratives carry (Cederberg 2014, 145), as well as come to a better understanding of how infrastructures of migrant intimacies emerge and how the intra-activity of human and material worlds might be captured.

In the following sections, I present the results of my analysis using the analytical distinction of infrastructures as housing, people, and places. In practice, however, these infrastructures were intertwined as social, material, and affective webs producing intersectional differences.

Housing as a human and more-than-human web

I begin by describing the setting of an interview with one of my key informants, drawing on my fieldnotes. It was Tanja and her unique way of narrating her life that first sparked my interest in the infrastructures of intimacies as social, material and affective webs that migrants are plugged into. This is the reason why my first interview with her is a central focus of my analysis. I had arranged to meet Tanja – a young woman in her mid-twenties from Romania who had moved to Finland two years earlier and worked as a cleaner – at her apartment in the Helsinki metropolitan area. When I rang the doorbell, it took her a while to answer, as she had forgotten our appointment. Luckily, she was able to meet with me, since she was on sick leave with little else to do. She invited me to wait in the small hallway. It seemed she was not alone: I could hear another person (or other persons) in the apartment

– a two-bedroom with its own kitchen. I later learned she shared the apartment with her boyfriend, his mother and the mother's husband. Tanja did not want us to stay indoors. It was a beautiful summer day, so she grabbed a large bottle of Coca-Cola and some glasses and led me to the building's back garden. Only then did I realize we were close to a lake. Throughout the interview she repeatedly referenced the beautiful scenery surrounding us. She spoke passionately about her boyfriend, housing, nature and the climate, often in the same breath:

> Because here I have only one thing that I love, and that's my boyfriend. At home I have parents, my friends, the sea, which is salt water, and we have waves, and we have sounds, and here you don't have this. [...] And the sea, I was by the sea two or three days ago to swim – nah, it's not relaxing, it's not the same thing. It's not that salty – you assume it will be when you get water in your mouth, but of course it's not the same taste. It's not home.

In Tanja's account, intimacies emerged in the intra-action of human and more-than-human "bodies" such as waves, salt, sounds and water. They became entangled in the creation of affects such as loving, relaxing and feeling at home. Moving to another country evoked ambivalent feelings, as Tanja vividly illustrated by explaining how the taste of the sea was not quite the same as at home, making her long for Romania and preventing her from feeling completely at home in Finland. Yet, meaningful new intimacies emerged in the co-becomings of people, housing and places, as Tanja's story soon revealed.

Infrastructure failures (Wilson 2016, 248; Star 1999), such as a shortage of affordable rental apartments, may create precarious and temporary intimacies, as Tanja demonstrated when she described the various housing arrangements she had experienced while living in Finland. Her experiences were, to some extent, similar to those of many other interviewees who had moved from one apartment to another. Tanja recounted that she had lived in various apartments before finding the one where she was living at the time of our first interview:

> When I first came to Finland, I stayed with this friend who found me the job at the hotel. I was sharing a two-room apartment with her and my boyfriend. Eventually, we decided it was time to move because it was impossible for a couple and a single person to stay there together. The thing was, in the apartment, you had to enter the living room first, where she was staying, to go to the bathroom, the kitchen or the bedroom. She didn't have any privacy, so we moved out. We found an apartment, a guy sublet it, at a higher price of course. We didn't know much about this stuff, but we still paid 550 euros for that 32-square-metre studio apartment. We stayed there from September 2010 until April 2011. When we found this apartment, we were so desperate because in May this guy was coming to take his studio apartment back.

Although Tanja and her boyfriend were both working, her account reveals that they did not have the resources to get their own apartment, at least not when she first arrived. Thus, while a "failure" in the housing infrastructure and material conditions can create intimacies, these intimacies may not always be desirable. However, a network of people and creative housing solutions emerged as a kind of support system that enabled Tanja to enter the job market and live with her boyfriend.

Tanja's account also revealed another configuration of intimacy that had emerged in her life:

> And we came here, it was the first apartment we saw, and I fell in love with this beautiful lake and the beautiful view, and the thing is my sister-in-law, who was pregnant at the time, is living in [area close by]. And we put our cards on the table and I said we have nothing to lose: we need an apartment, we want to have a child someday, and we wanted to be close to his sister, my sister-in-law, because she was expecting, and she gave birth to a beautiful little girl, and we needed to be close to her. I wanted to help, because I love kids, and she needed a bit of help. And the lady loved us, that's the only reason she gave us the apartment, because we were eight families at the same viewing of the apartment. And I love it. And now we're living with my boyfriend's mother and her

> husband. It's kind of not nice, because we're four people in 46 square meters, but it's a start, as the people help us to grow and find jobs and move along. We offer the same thing now to other people, so I think it's kind of okay.

Tanja's account of her new neighborhood and apartment was very different from her descriptions of previous apartments. The neighborhood reminded her of the landscape in her home country, creating an affective connection not only between the countries but also between people and landscapes. Furthermore, Tanja's account reflects the argument that public discourse continues to privilege normative forms of domestic intimacy – that is, white, heterosexual nuclear families – over other domestic arrangements (Wilson 2012, 38). Tanja's account revealed not only how a (white) heterosexual couple norm is being (re)produced in the rental housing market but also why, as migrants, they particularly felt the need to perform it:

> Mm, it's very hard to find an apartment in Finland, especially if you're a foreigner, because a lot of people don't accept that. [...] It's not racism; it's something else. I don't know; it doesn't have a name. But I noticed that if you go to a shop [...] there's this thing, "speak with me in my language" [in Finnish], and that's normal – I don't judge it. So, it was the same thing with the apartment. [...] When we found this apartment, it was such a relief. It was very hard because we had to pay two months' deposit, and we had to go to Nordea to ask for money and took out a loan. [...] You have money, but you don't have money – you just see the pay slip come, and after that, poof, it's gone.

Even though Tanja did not want to cite "racism" as one of the reasons it was difficult to find an apartment, she made it clear that she was being treated the same way in other settings. In her account, intimacy emerges not only through family relations and class but also through heteronormativity. However, as previous critical whiteness studies on Romanian intra-EU migrants have shown, Romanians may also be excluded from hegemonic whiteness (Paraschivescu 2020, 2667), as Tanja's account illustrates. Her story reveals some of the normativities, tensions and perhaps silences within intimacies, alongside the material practices, worries and hopes that emerged in her everyday life (Korjonen-Kuusipuro & Kuusisto 2019, 367).

People as infrastructure in changing intimacies

Most of the people I interviewed were living or had previously lived in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Cities constitute various infrastructural webs that people enter in order to cope with living in a foreign country, as Ajay, a young South Asian man who had moved to Finland six years earlier to study but was not living in the Helsinki metropolitan area, explained to me:

> And most of my friends moved to Helsinki after their studies. All of them. It's just me and maybe two or three other students who came with me who are still here, otherwise in Helsinki. […] They're doing well, their salaries are better. […] And, of course, there are more people there […]. And transport is also easier there.

Satnam, a 26-year-old South Asian man who had come to Finland to study three years earlier, also described his social networks to me:

> And then my Finnish friends, they invited me to a summer cottage, and last year I visited [city name]. There was this one lake. It was really great, lovely days there. We had a sauna there, a traditional sauna, and we even jumped into the ice to wash.

In Satnam's account, as in many others, the first impression of Finland was quite shocking, especially regarding the cold weather and winter darkness. However, as Satnam's experience shows, the cold could take on a different quality when shared with friends by an icy lake. In this setting, friendship enmeshing with the sauna and the cold lake made Satnam feel good, at least for a while.

Most of my informants had experience living (temporarily or long-term) in non-traditional arrangements, such as a single person sharing an apartment with co-workers arranged by their employer, a couple living with one partner's co-workers, three generations living under one roof, a woman living with a group of men from the same country of origin, and a settled migrant woman sharing a apartment with other women. Such temporary material arrangements can also co-constitute precarious and fragmented human relationships. However, the informants' accounts revealed that relationships tended to emerge in more complex ways. Anita, the Estonian woman mentioned in the introduction, explained in her follow-up interview that she had moved to a new apartment. She cited various reasons for this, including the frequent electricity outages in their shared house. Nevertheless, she kept in touch with some of the men, and said they still saw each other occasionally over dinner, forming a circle of (im)mobile friendships.

For some, the housing arrangements became a more permanent way of life. Greta, an Estonian woman in her sixties, explained that she had shared apartments with other Estonian women the whole time she had lived in Finland, which was now more than a decade:

> And we are three women, and we work in the same company. We're all almost the same age. [...] We get along fine; everyone has their own room. However, for a couple of years, we lived in a setup where there was only one room for two women, with one living on one side of the room and the other on the opposite side, and we got along fine. If there's no family living nearby, you have your workmates to talk to. Everyone has their own computer and TV and all that, and they prepare their own food.

The living arrangements and networks of people discussed by the interviewees suggest some similarities with the queer concept of chosen families (Weston 1991) or commune-living (Heinonen 2023). This infrastructure of people (Simone 2004) does indeed emerge as a kind of refuge or chosen family for individuals who no longer have their families of origin nearby. Migrant intimacies thus defy normative arrangements that define family as a unit based primarily on biological ties within a traditional nuclear structure. While these arrangements differ slightly and often maintain some connection to biological families, accounts like those of Anita and Greta align with the queer paradigm.

Greta explained how her housing arrangement had come about, the women sharing a country of origin and first language, being of the same age, and working in the same company. To some extent, the initial interview also challenged conventional ideas of intimacy and proximity, as the women shared not only the apartment but, at times, even the same room. While the first interview highlighted the women's individualities and separate lives, reflecting norms of liberal individuality (see Keskinen 2017), the follow-up interview revealed a different form of intimacy:

> Last year was tough, because one of my former roommates died [...]. It was, oh, really harsh. That's why last year was a bad year, but now I've moved past it. [...] She was my roommate – not in the apartment I live in now, but the previous one: one room, one living on one side of the room and the other on the other. I went through the papers with her daughter, I was acting as a translator, since her daughters live in Estonia and don't know any Finnish. All the bank issues and other things, I was supporting them.

This experience of loss revealed the depth of Greta's relationship with her roommate and its co-becoming with the shared room. Indeed, the intimacy ultimately extended beyond the material arrangement, as Greta also connected with her roommate's daughters and helped them. Greta's account suggests that even if people do not connect through obvious or 'normal' everyday activities, such as watching TV or making dinner, intimacies can be configured in other ways. Furthermore, the intra-acting of the intimacy included not only the materiality of the housing arrangement but also time: the intimacy was described more intensely after the roommate's death. Notably, after her roommate's passing, the room itself seemed to emerge as an active participant, having shaped the relationship between the two women as an intimate and meaningful space. In the initial interview, the shared room was discussed more as a passive infrastructure. However, the changes in Greta's life highlighted the idea of a room having the capacity to influence and deepen human connections beyond mere work-based associations.

Greta's and Anita's life stories illustrate how moving to Finland had resulted in living their lives with people other than romantic partners or biological families. Although they had previously conformed to the heteronormative couple norm, their intimate relationships subsequently aligned with lifestyles that were, at least for people their age, non-normative. While their lifestyle in Finland may not fully fit the "chosen family" category, they nonetheless became more than just co-workers living under the same roof, thus challenging the notion that only romantic relationships provide validation, meaning, and security (Kolehmainen et al. 2023; Heinonen 2023).

Another form of intimacy was discussed by Mohammad, a 30-year-old South Asian man, who had arrived in Finland two years earlier. At the time of our first interview, he was awaiting a work permit while simultaneously holding down several jobs. The job he seemed to enjoy most was working as a personal assistant for individuals unable to perform daily tasks independently due to disability, aging, or illness. Although he considered the informal caregiving customarily provided by family in his home country as more valuable than Finland's formal care system, his role as a personal assistant appeared meaningful to him beyond the job itself. While discussing his experiences of getting to know Finnish people, he highlighted work relationships that had become more than just professional ties:

> My client, the client I've been working with the past two to three months, is a good friend; he shares everything with me. If he's thinking about getting a new bicycle, he sends me a photo on Facebook, like this. My colleague, my boss, is a good friend.

Like Mohammad, several of my interviewees talked about their (Finnish) work clients or bosses as friends. However, more-than-work relations with employers and supervisors can sometimes create a heightened dependency on the employer – for example, if the employer arranges housing or assists with residency permits, as was the case with some of my interviewees (both EU and non-EU migrants) (see also Könönen 2011). Consequently, some more-than-work relations emerged as ambivalent but also temporary, as some of the research participants changed workplaces in search of better opportunities.

Intimate and racialized public–private places

In this subsection, I discuss in greater detail how intimacies co-become with places. Shopping malls appear to hold particular significance for migrants in urban spaces (see Hewidy & Lilius 2022). I conducted some interviews in or near shopping centers located along another infrastructure: underground train lines. My process of following research participants' paths through the (sub)urban setting often began with taking the metro to a shopping center, library, or cafeteria close to an underground station. Shopping center restaurants and cafeterias not only served as interview venues, but were also places that co-became with intimacies. Triin, a 24-year-old Estonian woman who had moved to Finland a year earlier and whom I interviewed twice in shopping centers, told me in the first interview how she met her fiancé:

> I met him here, actually [laughing a lot]. Yes, I was here all evening with my friends – they had a party first – and he couldn't talk to me because I was never alone, but then I was near the bathrooms, and he wanted to come talk to me and asked me for my number. I never usually give out my number in a nightclub, but after the first date we were together all the time. And he lived near here.

The places discussed by Triin and others mapped out the co-becomings of migrant intimacies, with shopping centers, housing and transport connecting them to other migrants. However, as Triin discussed in the follow-up interview, some places also emerged as sites of disconnection and racialized intimacies. She told me that her former (Estonian) landlady had disapproved of her relationship with her Ethiopian partner, which had prompted Triin to move in with him. The way Triin talked about shopping centers recalled how Wilson (2016, 257) and others discuss certain everyday spaces. For Triin, the shopping center was a place she could go not only to hang out with her new-born and to shop but also to enjoy herself, reminiscent of the queering of everyday places. Wilson (2016, 257) might describe this as "an experiential or intimate reading of infrastructures," which reveals how racialized power relations enter into the co-becoming of intimacies. In the follow-up interview, Triin shared that after her child was born, the shopping center shifted from a space of potential romance and fun (the nightclub) to an uncomfortable place where she felt that her interracial family and new-born baby were not accepted but rather condemned by racist glances.

Another form of intimacy involving co-becoming with space that drew suspicious looks was described by Ola, a 27-year-old man from Central Africa whom I interviewed twice. During the follow-up interview, conducted six years after his arrival in Finland, Ola appeared visibly frustrated with my seemingly naïve or simplistic questions about "integrating" into Finnish society:

> I don't know how to really become friends with a Finn. Believe me, I don't know how. Maybe you can give me a tip, I don't know. You and I, we are talking like this; somebody may say, maybe he's, like, trying to date her.

According to Ola, the emergence of interracial intimacy in a public space (such as a cafeteria, as in our case) was invariably interpreted as romantic, which annoyed him. Ola's comment and he context of our interaction illustrate that black men position themselves as heterosexual, but this position also contributes to a "double-edged" racialized perception of them: "heterosexually superior" but also "promiscuous" and "dangerous" (Wilkins 2012, 168). Furthermore, the cafeteria as a relational space amplified the intimacy between Ola and me, effectively actualizing the social, material and affective dimensions of intersectionality (Tiainen et al. 2020). As infrastructure, the place was not a passive backdrop but a relational and "living mediation of what organizes life" (Berlant 2016, 393) and intimacies.

Conclusion: Intersectional differences emerging in temporary, precarious and ambivalent intimacies

My article highlights several key findings that address the question of how human and more-than-human infrastructures come together as intimacies in migrants' accounts. First, as low-paid workers with migrant backgrounds, the research participants face multiple challenges in finding a place to live in cities, including excessively high rental prices, racism and their migrant status. In response, they devise creative ways to live, sometimes in non-normative arrangements that differ from their previous living situations. These new housing arrangements create novel forms of intimacy in their relationships with relatives, co-workers and spouses, leading to both joy and discomfort. However, reading housing as intra-acting (Barad 2007, 2008), where non-human elements enmesh with human relationships, revealed that research participants also took care of each other and found comfort in their new environments, including nature.

Secondly, I found that people provided informal infrastructure (Simone 2014, 2021) for the research participants. Through relationships with co-workers, compatriots, supervisors, and employers, they gained access to housing which was otherwise difficult to obtain due to discrimination. Individuals such as clients, employers, and co-workers played a crucial role as intermediaries, albeit sometimes only temporarily. However, working under fixed-term contracts and with temporary residence permits also entailed precarious and fragmented intimate relations.

Thirdly, my findings illustrate how public spaces can become intimate and racialized. By reading everyday infrastructures through a queer lens (Wilson 2016), I found that places like shopping malls can serve as intimate spaces where people form intimate connections – for example meeting in a nightclub – but during the day, while shopping, these "same" intimate relationships can become racialized and stigmatized.

These empirical results reveal how migrant intimacies emerge in diverse and unexpected ways that cannot be fully captured with the traditional notion of intimacy as a romantic relationship between humans. Drawing on queer-theoretical (Berlant 2000, Wilson 2012, 2016; Kolehmainen et al. 2021; Hammack et al. 2019; Juvonen & Kolehmainen 2018) and post-humanist thinking, including new materialism (e.g., Barad 2007; Latimer & López Gómez 2019), I incorporated concepts that encompass both human and more-than human dimensions to examine intimacies in relation to migrancy and precarisation in a more nuanced way.

As result, I found that intimacies in my research participants' lives emerged as temporary, precarious and ambivalent, intersecting with differences not only of race, class, gender, and sexuality but also of materiality (Tiainen et al. 2020). The study thus reveals the many ways in which the precarious workers' everyday infrastructures (housing, people, places) are experienced as intimate but also how they come to matter in terms of gender and race, highlighting "the ideological and affective dimensions of altered conditions for intimacy" (Wilson 2012, 39).

By incorporating material and spatial dimensions into the analysis of intimacies and intersectional differences, I demonstrated how relations that may at first appear primarily economic (e.g., employee–employer) or racialized (e.g., interviewer–informant) emerge in a more complex and intimate matter. My findings indicate that non-human elements have the capacity to intensify relations between bodies and evoke ambivalent emotions among migrants, such as contentment, homesickness, and irritation. As such, non-human elements can be identified as "affective conductors" of intimacies (Puar 2012).

The proposed understanding of intimate relationships and housing arrangements as more diverse than previously thought owes much to queer theory. However, migrants are positioned intersectionally vis-à-vis queer theoretical thinking about intimacies. By this, I mean that the lives and intimate webs of my research participants are strongly determined by migration and the residence permit system. Nonetheless, their housing and living arrangements, such as shared houses and multigenerational households, are reminiscent of findings from queer research: they sometimes appear "strange" and frequently do not conform to the normative categories of housing or proximity prevalent in Finland. In other words, they defy established, normative models. Within these "strange" formations, individuals sustain their own lives and those of others while becoming part of the social reproduction of the cities' infrastructural webs (Simone 2021).

Queer theory opens a way to subvert and disrupt (hetero)normative middle-class models of intimate relationships (Giffney & Hird 2008, 5). However, my intention is neither to romanticize nor stigmatize models that do not fit into normative categories of intimacy, as these models may be out of reach for some. My infrastructural reading of intimacies has shown that migrancy configures intimate networks in diverse ways. While this open-ended approach has enabled me to challenge the traditional boundaries of intimacies, it is important to note that non-normative intimacies operate in a broader context where the welfare state, labor market, and flows of capitalism intersect with inadequate wages, the residence permit system, and racism. Thus, the intimacies that emerge in the lives of my research participants do not align easily with either white (hetero)normative concepts of intimacy or some popular queer notions of intimacy, such as the chosen family.

Finally, through the application of queer theory, I have been able to "make visible", "unsettle", "celebrate" (Giffney & Hird 2008, 5), and rethink migrant intimacies beyond (hetero)normative ideas using a new materialist perspective. Barad (2008, 318) argues that post-humanizing queer provides an ontological ground for subverting sexism, racism, and homophobia, which are all sustained by the binaries of nature/culture and human/non-human. In my investigation of how infrastructures converge in migrants' accounts, binaries such as human/more-than-human do not hold: the co-becoming approach shows how human and non-human intra-act continually in the making of intimacies. Thus, in line with Barad, I see potential for an ontological-methodologicalpolitical alliance in studies of various configurations, including precarious migrant workers and other marginalized groups, from a materialist ontology perspective.

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NOTES

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